

# EFFECTIVE TALKING IN CONFERENCE

DIRECTNESS-COURTESY-CAUTION

*By*

JOHN MANTLE CLAPP

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## PREFACE

This book deals with one of the important and difficult responsibilities of a busy man, his handling of the informal discussion of conferences and small meetings. Important because it is in the intimate meetings of small groups that decisions are made and plans worked out. Difficult because full success in winning your point requires the precision of aim of public speaking as well as the naturalness of conversation.

For many years I have been called in by small groups of business executives and professional men, as well as individuals, seeking command of the technique of this arm's-length talking. Out of many practical sessions, with men reproducing in their talk the actual situations of their business day, and exchanging frank round-the-table analysis of matter and manner, a few key principles have developed.

Now talking is a natural activity—like walking—in which common sense will guide us if we start right. Men who have “never been talkers,” when once they learn to apply these First Aid Principles, find themselves able to meet successfully the demands of conference discussion and even of larger meetings.

Chapters 1 to 8 of this book outline these principles. Chapters 9 to 14 supplement them with suggestions and exercises, tested in the practical sessions referred to, for developing readier command of the mechanisms of presentation—appearance, voice, and language.

J. M. C.

New York, December, 1947

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1 A SHOOTING GALLERY FOR PRACTICE . . . . .	3
2 RESPONSIBLE TALKING—FIRST AIDS . . . . .	12
3 THE SECRET OF SUCCESS—TALK TO THE PEOPLE BEFORE YOU: DON'T DELIVER A MONOLOGUE . . . . .	16
4 THE ARCH-ENEMY—YOUR OWN PREOCCUPATION . . . . .	26
5 OUTWITTING THE ENEMY—CONTROLS . . . . .	42
6 CONTROL NO. 1—MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A MESSAGE AND DETERMINE JUST WHAT IT IS . . . . .	45
7 CONTROL NO. 2—FRAME YOUR MESSAGE BEFOREHAND . . . . .	52
8 CONTROL NO. 3—WATCH YOUR LISTENERS AND TALK TO THEM ONE BY ONE . . . . .	62
9 CONDITIONING YOURSELF THROUGH GOOD HABITS . . . . .	69
10 IMPROVING YOUR APPEARANCE . . . . .	74
11 RECOVERING THE GOOD VOICE YOU WERE BORN WITH . . . . .	84
12 FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS READILY . . . . .	104
13 GROUPING WORDS EFFECTIVELY—SENTENCES . . . . .	119
14 DO NOT TALK TOO MUCH . . . . .	133
INDEX . . . . .	139



**EFFECTIVE TALKING  
IN CONFERENCE**

## Chapter 1

### A SHOOTING GALLERY FOR PRACTICE

When your views are asked for at a business conference, a club meeting, or a neighborhood rally, do you speak up as readily as in conversation? Or do you sit silent, thinking you cannot "talk to an audience"?—The result, in that case, may be serious. Or, while not helpless, do you find it hard to say just what you mean on such an occasion, though other people seem to have no trouble? Now the fact is that talking to a group of listeners is not at all difficult if you take the right attitude. A dancing school for grown-ups used to insist: "If you can walk, you can learn to dance." Well, if you can answer back in conversation you can learn to talk to a number of people together, and do it effectively. This book offers First Aid. It can help you, by the way, even with conversation. Are you quite satisfied with your score in that apparently simple activity?

These chapters give the key suggestions developed with some New York business and professional men who had discovered that talking to small groups—Conference Talking—was a business necessity for them. In their unconventional practice group—the first members named it the Speakers' Clinic—this set of suggestions and exercises was gradually built up.

**A Laboratory for Practice.**—The Speakers' Clinic had its origin in a plea for assistance that came to me a few years ago from the vice-president of a chain of retail stores, a man for whom I had done some editing. "You've

had a lot of experience," he burst out one day, "in training people to talk. Can't you give me some help with the speaking I have to do in committees and conferences, when I can't turn it over to anyone else? It's responsible talking, and I've never been a talker. I can't make my points on short notice. Or there's friction, and people take my remarks the wrong way."

"You couldn't have a Course to cover that," I said. "Every case is different."

"I know," he came back, "every case is different. But some men seem to know how to handle any situation, and I've got to learn."

"How could you get at it?" I asked. "So-called Public Speaking study is mostly just shadow boxing. Would you be willing to bring in real material to be taken apart, and see your soul hung up and criticized?"

His answer surprised me. "Why, that's just what I'm looking for. I'm not interested in Public Speaking. And I don't want a Course. What I need is to have someone watch me when I'm really trying to put a thing through with a group and tell me honestly what the score is and why. Couldn't you fix up a little shooting gallery to practice in?"

My astonishment deepened when in less than a month I received almost the same inquiry, independently, from a partner in a leading firm of certified public accountants and then from the assistant to the president of a large manufacturing company. What impressed me was not so much the fact of responsible men in widely different fields wishing to learn to "talk better," but their serious motive. When such a man takes a "Public Speaking Course," as not infrequently happens, it is apt to be merely with the idea of putting on a smoother polish, as he might have his hands manicured. But my three executives had no interest

in pleasant facility. They had found they needed skill in Conference Talking as a tool in their business.

**Improving in Conference Talking—The Problem.**—Now conference talking, the presentation of ideas in small meetings, has become the most important type of group address today because it is in conferences and committee sessions that decisions are made. The function of large meetings is much like that of the radio, to broadcast an issue or a decision. Speeches for the big occasions may be left to others, or you can have them written by “ghosts” and read them. In a conference, on the other hand, you are on your own; the talking required in this arm’s-length discussion is indeed “responsible.” Moreover, conference talking has a special technique, which is not widely understood, though some individuals have become very skillful at it, as my friends had discovered. While every resource of logic and persuasion is in order, the form must always be simple, as in conversation. Yet there must be no conversational rambling or casualness, for always a definite point has to be made in a limited time.

The guiding principle of conference discussion differs radically from that of parliamentary procedure, which also is important for an active man or woman to know. Parliamentary procedure assumes a battle between opposing views; it provides a set of rules to assure a fair fight. But with conference talking the aim is always to keep fights from starting, to see that all concerned maintain the attitude of “come let us reason together.”

Could this technique be acquired by men like my friends, forty-odd years old and very busy, men who had “never been talkers”? Could a practice scheme be planned by which they could get its essentials, in the time they could spare? The medicine must be potent. What

was more, it must command the respect of these intelligent men, must be free from artificiality. Efforts to improve in the highly intimate matter of presenting ideas by word of mouth tend always to get snarled in artificiality. The reason is that normal talking is never an end in itself but only a means; we talk in order to get something done. When we let our mind focus on improving our manner, in order to rid ourselves of carelessness or clumsiness, we are "terribly likely" to slip into affectation, and then we are worse off than before. The problem for these executives—it is the problem, indeed, for everyone—was how to devise a practice scheme by which a man could watch his manner while at the same time thinking primarily of driving home his ideas.

**Setup of the Clinic—Four Requisites.**—The "shooting gallery" idea gave us the clue. Good talking is a matter of marksmanship, that is, of coordinating thought, language, and expression to hit a specific target. Moreover, the competition of a "gallery" would keep the meetings mentally interesting, and that was necessary; you do not get spontaneous talk through dull routine. As I pondered the problem my friends had raised, four requisites took shape in my mind, based on experiences in earlier years, and I talked them over with the men who had approached me, strangers to one another, and three other men whom they had interested.

**A "Little Shooting Gallery."**—The first requisite was suggested by the phrase, "*a little shooting gallery.*" The group we set up must be small, partly because of the necessity that every member get personal attention, but more especially because the conference talking they had in mind is an affair of small groups. Now, long ago, in my first years of teaching out at Illinois College, the alma

mater of William Jennings Bryan, I had found that having a practice group small was a help, not a hindrance. Talking to an audience involves, of course, magnifying the conversational *scale*—speaking louder, for instance—and also broadening the *scope* of presentation, because your statements must fit more than the individual listener. Yet the “audience” need not be large; in fact the problem develops as soon as two individuals must be addressed at the same time. Fully a third of the graduates of that little prairie college in those years won prominence later as lawyers, physicians, heads of businesses, college professors, largely because of the skill in expressing their ideas which they developed in college. My teaching must have been amateurish in the extreme; I was as young as my students and we just plodded along together. But the Bryan tradition was there to stimulate the boys and the classes were small. The medicine had a full chance at every student. They worked at close quarters, and they learned from one another.

**Real Material—A Definite Purpose.**—The second requisite was indispensable, that of having real material and a definite purpose in every talk. The mature men who wanted help had to deal with real issues in their conferences, and obtain definite results. That recalled my later experience on the English faculty of Indiana University, Wendell Willkie’s college, where coaching the college debates was part of my duty. The object was always to win the decision, by sound logic and fair persuasion, with no recourse to tricks or sharp practice. One youngster after another on the squads discovered the compelling power that lies in plain facts, presented with grim earnestness, without embroidery. Think a case through until you find its meaning, the facts that lie at the bottom. Then you do not have to hedge or pull your

punches; you can speak the truth and shame the devil without losing your head or your temper.

Those Indiana boys discovered also that your talk is much more likely to remain real if you cut loose from manuscripts and build your thoughts together while talking, just as in conversation. Then your "speech" becomes, indeed, conversation with the audience. The technique worked out for Willkie, Paul McNutt, Arthur Greenwood, and the rest was rough and ready—rough with earnestness that gripped attention and ready because they knew the answers when challenged. The practice talks of these business men ought to have a definite purpose every time.

**Mutual Criticism, Friendly but Honest.**—The third requisite was that of candid mutual appraisal, friendly but unsparing, something life rarely gives us. I had seen the value of that in our little theater at Lake Forest College. Few of our boys and girls were natural stars. So we put sensitiveness aside and got all hands to tell frankly what actually impressed them, instead of what a performer had thought they would like. It was disconcerting. But it did bring out the capacities that are latent in so-called average people and gave us some mighty good college acting. Why not try the same medicine, honest appraisal of matter as well as manner, with these grown men?

**Variety—A Cross Section of Public Opinion.**—One more point came to mind: variety within the group. Among the adult classes I had conducted in New York, one differed sharply from all the rest. During the depression of the Thirties men and women on relief were assigned to teach their specialties to other adults in free classes. They had been foremen in factories, artists, ac-

countants, lawyers. Few of them had any teaching experience; they did not know how to get their material across to their miscellaneous enrollees. New York University, backed by the Carnegie Foundation, offered these people instruction in teaching methods and I was asked to help them with the talking they had to do in their classes.

That was a stimulating experience. Those men and women were in deadly earnest; they had to make good on their jobs and the result was surprising. Here was the reason. The subjects taught by the fifty individuals in my two sections ranged over twenty-six distinct fields, from Aeronautical Engineering to Waiting on Table. This meant that each of the fifty, when he got up in my practice class, faced the tough situation of a specialist addressing laymen, which was precisely the situation he faced with his own enrollees. As a consequence, virtually all of them quickly grasped one prime essential for successful address to audiences, that of adjusting the form of your ideas to people who are different from yourself. Obviously, here was a pointer for our Clinic setup.

By keeping the membership diversified, also, with sales people and accountants, bankers and trade association men, we should obtain a sort of cross section of public opinion in the criticisms, and thus strengthen the atmosphere of reality.

**Organization of the Group.**—So the Speakers' Clinic laboratory started off. Only a few men were asked to join, to insure ample time for everyone at each meeting. The members came from different fields. Each one agreed to bring material in which he was genuinely interested, as relating to his business or personal affairs, and present it seriously to the others. After every talk the other men present would state frankly their reaction to both matter



and manner. This setup, we were to find, eliminated artificiality almost entirely.

My own part was to supplement the group discussions by keeping in close touch with every man and giving him privately specific advice that seemed pertinent, going to the mat, if he desired, with respect to logic, language, voice, appearance, and, in general, the way he played his hand. My duty, in effect, was to help each man work out his individual objective.

**Results of This Laboratory.**—This informal laboratory has continued ever since, new men joining as their friends drop out. Attendance is flexible; since all of the members are busy, they attend, drop out, or return, as in a gymnasium. There are no lessons or assignments. The speeches at a session may include an argument on a front-page topic, an analysis of a technical problem, a pep talk, a report to a board of directors, a story—anything the speaker wishes to test out. The talks average seven to ten minutes in length, often running longer. Rattling off a three-minute “speech,” a verbal 50-yard dash, does little to help you with the art of building or defending a case.

The members have varied widely in background and personality. They have not altered their personalities or learned any mechanical rules. But, through working with real material under real conditions, nearly all have developed an efficiency they had not looked for. Today, when one of them has something to say he can say it effectively, whether it takes five minutes or thirty minutes, whether at a Clinic meeting or in a large hall. They have discovered, by the way, that one who has learned to present a case well in a small group finds it easy to broaden out when summoned by larger audiences.

They have also discovered, what no one anticipated, that the experience has greatly improved their skill in

conversation—something impossible to get at directly in any practice group. The most valuable factor, I believe, has been the candid mutual criticism.

**The Gist of the Clinic Method.**—In the course of time many suggestions about method and exercises of various kinds have been brought up at Clinic meetings and tested in actual experiment. Gradually these have been reduced in number to a few key points, enough to keep a man on the right road without hampering his individuality. It is this material, the gist of the improvement program which Speakers' Clinic members have found profitable, that you have in the following pages. It may meet your own needs, or may give your mind something to spark from.

To obtain full benefit from these First Aids you should be in a situation resembling that of members of the Clinic. That is, you should have some business or social responsibility which requires you to take part frequently in conferences or meetings, real occasions bringing real issues which you must handle. Very likely your business will provide such occasions. If at present this is not the case, you may find it worth while to join some club or association committee. Tying up your speaking practice always with an actual situation will keep your talking real, which is a first condition of success.

## Chapter 2

### RESPONSIBLE TALKING—FIRST AIDS

Have you ever stopped to think that talking, communicating ideas to other people by word of mouth, is the most important of human activities, after those by which physical life is maintained? How important few of us recognize, because it is so intimate a part of our daily existence. For that reason also we do not realize how complex a process is involved. Merely on its mechanical side, the act of talking utilizes a code of signals—language, tones of the voice, attitudes, and movements—that is elaborate in the extreme. In truth, really expert command of the process of translating ideas into words, tones, and attitudes comes only gradually for anyone, through observation, experiment, attendance at the University of Human Nature, maturity. Yet anyone can learn. You cannot be taught the art of responsible talking but you can learn.

**Clumsiness at the Outset Means Nothing.**—In conversation, although few of us manage the intricate operation of speech really well, everyone manages it passably. We begin using it so early that it seems to us a matter of course, instinctive. In conversation we are hardly more conscious of how we are talking than of how we are breathing. But sooner or later almost everyone in active life is called on to talk to a number of listeners together, to an audience, and then comes a glimpse of the complexity of the speech process. Perhaps, as a guest at a Rotary luncheon, you are asked to get up and “make a

few remarks." Or you are elected to a club office and find that you must deliver a speech. Or, at a conference in your own office, there comes a moment when all those present turn their eyes upon you for a connected statement of your ideas. Suddenly the familiar act of talking takes on an appearance of strangeness and difficulty. The reason is merely that you are challenged unexpectedly to frame your thoughts with more care than in ordinary conversation, doing consciously what you have always done automatically, and you are confused. Ignoring the fact that you might get the same disconcerting reaction in an important interview—many of us do—you attribute it to the presence of the group. You are likely to assume, quite incorrectly, that addressing a number of people together calls for special gifts which you do not possess. If you make some trifling slip you may jump to the mistaken conclusion that there are fatal defects in the way you communicate ideas on such an occasion, that your manner of speech will never do before an audience. Thousands of competent men and women, in every walk of life, stop at this point, to their lasting disadvantage.

**First Aid Sets You Going—Then Nature Takes Charge.**—The pioneers of the Speakers' Clinic, fortunately for themselves, did not stop here. Recognizing that there were occasions, which could not be avoided, for talking to groups, they resolved to find something in the nature of First Aid that would enable them to get by. To their surprise and pleasure they discovered that in this matter First Aid can do much more than just get you by. In fact, it is all that an intelligent person really needs to start him toward full command of his normal powers.

The differences between talking to an individual and talking to ten, twenty, or a hundred persons together are

minor. A few practical suggestions can carry you through the necessary steps of adapting the familiar technique of conversation to what is required with an audience. The next few chapters of this book, drawing for illustration upon actual experiences at Speakers' Clinic sessions and other small meetings, analyze briefly the problem of responsible talking and outline simple controls. After that Nature will become your lifelong teacher. That is the story of all who become really skillful in communicating ideas by word of mouth. They pick up, somehow, the equivalent of the First Aids outlined here, and then observe and experiment for themselves.

**Preserving Spontaneity.**—Beware of artificiality! For one thing, do not begin by tinkering with some mechanical detail, trying to remedy some supposed "fault" of which you have been made aware by the injudicious remark of an acquaintance—perhaps the way you pronounce certain words. That gets you nowhere; it leads to artificiality. You can never correct yourself into skillful talking. First, because there are too many details in the big process and they are too variously interrelated. Secondly, and most important, any such attempt kills your one real asset, your sincerity, your spontaneity. Spontaneous talking carries, along with what you say, a between-the-words picture of what you *are*, and it is this impression of the "you" behind your words by which listeners gauge their significance. Details can be dealt with later. Tinkering with them at the outset would make your talking artificial and feeble.

**Key Principles—A Right Mental Attitude.**—But improvement comes surely and speedily when you apply a few psychological principles that relate to your own attitude of mind. The intricate system of nerves and

muscles involved in communicating thought by word of mouth is geared to work as a unit. When you put yourself into the right mental attitude, by applying these key principles, Nature takes charge and your entire communication apparatus swings into coordinated action. That is why, under the stimulus of an emergency, "dumb" men are sometimes moved to eloquence.

To learn to talk better you do not want a treatise or a long course of instruction; these generally kill your individuality. You need, instead, First Aids to get you started. If you will follow the advice in the next few chapters you will not have to depend upon an emergency to unseal your lips. You will find yourself using at once the abilities you already possess, in a manner sufficient for immediate needs. Your first scores will be high or low, of course, according as your communication apparatus is more or less sensitive and flexible. But you can make a creditable showing with a group of listeners right now.

Later chapters will outline suggestions and exercises by which you can gradually render your communication apparatus more responsive and thus condition yourself to do better.

## Chapter 3

### THE SECRET OF SUCCESS— TALK TO THE PEOPLE BEFORE YOU: DON'T DELIVER A MONOLOGUE

The secret of success, when you have something to impart to other people by word of mouth, is very simple. It boils down to one homely principle: Talk to the people in front of you; don't talk to yourself; don't soliloquize. This sound principle is illustrated afresh by every good jury lawyer and by every street vendor as he gathers a crowd and works them up to buying; it comes to the surface in one way or another at every session of such a group as the Speakers' Clinic. Stated in other terms, this is what it means: While talking, focus your thought upon just one point: how the people you address are taking your remarks.

**Don't Soliloquize.**—In the old-time theater an actor would often turn from the others on the stage and the action in progress to deliver a series of reflections. This was called "soliloquizing," talking to oneself. The stupid old practice has been eliminated from the theater of to-day, but its equivalent is still far too common on the part of speakers in meetings or conferences.

Don't let yourself deliver a monologue! Don't let your mind drift away to dwell on the ideas you are presenting and wonder whether they are the right ones; it is too late for that. Don't fret over whether you are covering them as fully as you would like, whether your language is strictly correct or your appearance all that might be de-

sired. To do that in conversation would be absurd; don't do it with a group. When you have begun to talk, think only of your listeners, and according as responses come to you from their faces and manner, feed them your message.

Getting a message through involves, of course, a number of factors: the items you select for mention; the way you arrange them; the language you employ; your voice and manner of speaking; your appearance. Later pages will have practical suggestions regarding these. But if you stop to think about such matters while you are talking, you will forget the listeners and look inward, upon your own mind. What you say in that abstracted state is not really aimed at listeners at all; you are only "talking to yourself"—soliloquizing.

**A Free Channel—Your Mind to Theirs.**—These factors are merely accessories to the delivery of a message, not essentials. Some people—Theodore Roosevelt, Will Rogers, and Fiorello LaGuardia, for example—have achieved outstanding success before audiences, although scoring very low in some of the accessories. Overrating these minor factors is the cause of much of our difficulty. We think that if we lack them we cannot succeed and are discouraged. Or we put a mighty effort upon trying to develop them and neglect the one thing that really matters.

What really matters is this: Opening and keeping open a free channel between your mind and those of your listeners, through which ideas and suggestions may flow. Then, if you have something to say which seems good to those at the other end of the line, they take it gladly. The existence of such a free channel is a condition for all successful communication—talking to audiences, conversation, writing. Whether you are composing a novel or



joining in an office conference, unless you reach the minds of those you address so that they open to receive your suggestions, you fail, regardless of how valuable your thought may be, how carefully you have prepared it, how agreeable your personality.

**Formal Correctness vs. Results.**—Back in “Life With Father” days, when Brooklyn’s Flatbush region was still a marshy paradise for game birds, a Manhattan devotee of formal sport, faultlessly equipped, crossed the ferry for a day’s shooting. But the long day brought no ducks. As he and his friends were sadly making their way back to the end of the horse-car line, he spied an old colored man padding along through the mud, without shooting jacket, boots, or gamebag, but with a long string of ducks over his shoulder. Catching up with the old fellow the Manhattanite inquired: “Well, Uncle, did you hit them on the wing?” and received the mild reply, “On de wing, on de tail, boss, mos’ anywhar!” In your first talks to audiences don’t worry over questions of form and procedure. The essential point is to hit the ducks, to get the audience to listen.

**Make Listening Easy.**—When you address an audience you must create the free channel yourself, and keep it open. In conversation the talk drifts from topic to topic, and channels of communication open and close casually. But in talking to audiences you have a particular message to present to that group of people, right then, and you must flag their attention and hold it until you have covered your case. Audiences are not often actively hostile. They will listen for a moment to anything if you catch their attention, and continue listening if they find your remarks understandable and inoffensive. But they are passive; you have to reach them and keep hold. You

must watch them from start to finish and make listening easy.

**Primary Courtesies.**—To do this you must, of course, take care that all of them can hear you, and see you, without straining. This involves speaking more distinctly than is usual in conversation, more slowly, more loudly—as when talking with someone who is hard of hearing. When addressing a group of twenty persons or more it is wise to stand up. You should also try to avoid the fidgeting and slouching to which most of us are prone in conversation but which a group of listeners is almost certain to find distracting.

Besides these obvious courtesies, the fact that you are addressing a number of people at once will affect the form of your material. Beware of slipping in “asides” and incidental comments. In conversation they add to the interest, but they are out of place with a group because some of those present will not understand.

I recall an instance in the class for Vocational Teachers, previously mentioned. One of the members was a cultivated woman who had been a teacher of college English and whose work in the Relief Project consisted in teaching the rudiments of the language to foreign-born women. Another was a big, handsome colored man, a professional singer, who was teaching a class in Waiting on Table. At one of the sessions these two chanced to give specimens of the way they talked to their pupils. The English teacher’s talk was better at almost every point; it had good organization, full detail, charm of expression. But the members of the group rated it much lower in effectiveness, and they were right. What the man said was simple and no one could fail to get his meaning, whereas the professional teacher’s explanation was full of the asides, the exceptions and hedging, of an expert

talking to colleagues. Not being experts in English, the other members of the class could not follow her.

Sometimes persons of great ability neglect this primary requirement of simplicity when addressing audiences. Commissioner Robert Moses, the miracle man of the New York park system, once ran for governor. His conversation, like his letters and reports, is notable for clearness, force, and liveliness. In his campaign, he said, he wanted to "be natural, just to talk to the folks." He forgot that material cannot be presented to audiences of hundreds in the form that is suitable for a single listener or reader. His remarks were full of asides, which were the harder to grasp because he did not always sound his words distinctly. Governor Lehman, his opponent, talked plainly to the plain people he had to reach, without any fancy skating. That was one reason for Lehman's success.

**Making Them Want to Listen.**—But most of all, you must make those other people *want* to listen. Here lies the heart of the problem of talking to audiences. The people you are addressing have probably been thinking of something quite different from the message you wish to impart. To create your free channel, you have to flag their interest and turn it in your direction.

There are two ways of doing this, and you will find it advisable to avoid one of them and learn to apply the other. One method works from speaker to listeners. You beat a drum! Regardless of the mood of the audience and what may be in their minds, launching out from your own standpoint, you try to present your ideas so attractively or so sharply that the audience will be compelled to turn and listen. The other method works from listeners to speaker. You find out where their thought is and then tie your message to what they are thinking about or what they like.

**The Wrong Way.**—Beating a drum to get attention appears easier. It is the method that is natural to us all. Children employ it constantly, piping up without considering whether "Mother" is busy. Children are privileged, but for grown-ups this method is unwise. Interrupting other people's thought-streams, pulling their attention around to what we wish to discuss, brings antagonism. And in our eagerness to get the floor we sometimes, even the best of us, employ devices that seem to other people artificial if not egotistic. The classic example is that of the man who had a story about a gun. If the talk at dinner offered no easy opening he would stamp his foot under the table, we are told, and exclaim: "Bless me! Was that a gun? Speaking of guns, etc., etc."

None of us, I suppose, would apply this time-honored instance to his own case, because in our own eyes our purposes in talking are never so frivolous. Our listeners, however, do not know this. Their first reaction to the abrupt introduction of something we feel to be important may be as resentful as that of the gun-man's fellow guests. To begin by stirring dislike in those we wish to interest is not wise.

**The Right Way—Paul the Apostle.**—The other method of getting attention is far better. It utilizes the impetus of the listeners' thought-current. Instead of having to jerk the team to a stop and start them in a new direction, you hop on and travel with them, and then guide them to the point you have in mind. When Paul the Apostle sought to present the Christian doctrine to the Athenians, who prided themselves on their liberalism and advanced thinking, he began, the Bible relates, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the Un-

known God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you."

Paul's method has been followed by sagacious men in every age. It was used by a leading New York lawyer—incidentally, a graduate of Illinois College—before a great audience of insurance officials in London. He had been sent overseas to arrange an adjustment between British and American practice on a point of insurance technique. He opened his talk to the Britishers as follows: "When I was first approached on this matter, I thought I had been handed the impossible task of making eleven hundred Englishmen change their minds. I was relieved to discover that I was quite in error. What I have to report to you is only a further development of your own long-established custom, necessitated by conditions somewhat different from those in England."

Grady's Speech on "The New South."—One of the outstanding speeches in American history, the address on "The New South" by Henry W. Grady at the dinner of the New England Society of New York in 1886, is a notable example of the use of the Apostle's method. That speech by the young Georgia editor before New York's business and professional leaders gave Northerners a new and more sympathetic view of their fellow Americans below the Mason and Dixon Line.

Everyone knows the paragraphs, as fine in their way as the Gettysburg Address, in which Grady pictures "the footsore Confederate soldier, as, buttoning up in his faded gray jacket the parole, which was to bear testimony to his children of his fidelity and faith, he . . . turned his face Southward from Appomattox in April, 1865." Then the desolation he found "when he reached the home he left so prosperous and happy." Then what he did, "this hero in gray with the heart of gold. As ruin was never

before so overwhelming, never was restoration swifter; soldiers stepped from the trenches into the furrows; horses that had charged Federal guns moved before the plow, and fields that ran red with human blood in April were green with the harvest in June." The address won enthusiastic response from the distinguished audience; it was reprinted throughout the country and helped to set in motion a tide of philanthropic and economic aid to the South.

It is not generally known, however, with what care Grady led up to his appeal, deftly adjusting his presentation to the mood of the audience. He knew, of course, that he would be subjected to the closest scrutiny, as almost the first Southerner to address Northern leaders on such an occasion. It turned out, moreover, that he was immediately preceded by one of the outstanding Northern orators, the eloquent clergyman Dr. T. DeWitt Talmage, who brought the audience to their feet with a description of the Grand Review of the Union armies in Washington at the close of the war. What Grady did was this: Instead of trying at once to switch attention to his own message, he began with a series of mirth-producing stories, good ones, new ones. That diverted attention entirely from his position as emissary of the South and led the critical audience to think of him as a good fellow and an agreeable talker. Only then, with an ungrudging compliment for Dr. Talmage's address, did he swing into the message he had come so far to deliver.

**Responsible Talking a Practical Matter.**—In business and personal affairs alike, the right approach is by way of the listener's interests. Our purposes in responsible talking are practical. When we address a group it is nearly always to accomplish a definite aim not otherwise to be secured. We have to win cheerful support for a course

of action from people whose point of view is never quite like our own—fellow executives who are committed to another plan, subordinates who are ill-informed or sulky, customers or competitors who fear that their own interests are challenged by what is asked. Nevertheless there is a common ground somewhere or we should not venture to speak at all. It is wise to strike for this common ground at once.

Therefore, before speaking up at a conference, or when called upon for remarks at a luncheon meeting, say to yourself: "These people have such and such interests, tastes, and prejudices about this matter. What I have to say will interest them if they grasp it, but I must build a bridge from what is now occupying their attention. Besides, they would probably fire such and such questions at me if I were conversing with them individually. I must anticipate and answer the questions that are in their minds." However momentous the message you are carrying, adapt your presentation to the capacity and mood of the audience, as Grady did, as Paul did at Athens. Your work with the audience will be easier. You will feel that you are merely answering questions—returning the ball. And the listeners will meet you part way. You will not be confronted by rows of hostile faces on guard against an attempt to "make eleven hundred Englishmen change their minds."

Yes, that is the secret of success. Watch the listeners, see how they are taking what you say, and fit your remarks into their thought-stream. If you can keep from soliloquizing, you can talk to any audience successfully right now. The result you obtain will depend upon the value of your message, but if you focus attention on the people in front of you the message will have a full chance to register. Everyone succeeds in doing this at times.

Think back, and you will recall some occasion in your own experience. It may have been merely a conference with half a dozen persons, but consciously or unconsciously you centered attention upon *them* and the way they were reacting. You forgot everything except that you had to make them see your point, and you succeeded.

Your message is familiar to you; otherwise you would not be trying to present it. Therefore waste no energy in checking over its details as you go, but trust your mind to feed them into the talk as it does in conversation. If you operate in this way whenever you talk, you will succeed. You may or may not be thought of as a "fine speaker," but you will acquire a reputation that is much more valuable, of being able to "pick up a situation and handle it." When a really important occasion comes along, you will dispose of it almost without conscious effort.



## Chapter 4

### THE ARCH-ENEMY—YOUR OWN PREOCCUPATION

If the secret of talking to an audience is so simple, why do we so often fail? Because, it must be sorrowfully admitted, of a queer, perverse streak in our human make-up that leads us to turn our backs on our hearers at the very time when we should give them all attention. The devil we must fight, every moment, is none other than our own tendency to become absorbed in our sensations, our ideas, our point of view. In short, it is our own preoccupation.

Do not be discouraged, however. You can circumvent this devil. Once you have recognized the danger of becoming preoccupied and forgetting your listeners, you can fight it. You need to know the forms which the temptation most frequently assumes. They may be summarized in four groups: Beginner's Embarrassment, Carelessness, Misdirected Earnestness, and Overcarefulness.

**Beginner's Embarrassment.**—When we first face the eyes of an audience, the tendency to preoccupation takes the form of what may be called Beginner's Embarrassment. All of us, when we attempt a new activity, tend to become overconscious of our apparatus, whether muscular or mental, instead of concentrating upon putting it to use. Do you remember, when you first got on a bicycle, how viciously you gripped the handle bars? The tighter your grip, the poorer was your muscular coordination. This preoccupation with our apparatus troubles us often

in talking, even in conversation, in an important interview for example. It affects virtually everyone the first time he rises to address an audience. The unfamiliar situation—having to stand up, to meet a barrage of eyes, to speak louder and with extra distinctness—magnifies for the beginner the difficulty of imparting his message as he wishes. This embarrasses him and drives his attention inward at the very time when it should be directed outward upon the people he wants to reach.

**It Cures Itself—Disregard the Racketeer.**—Take notice, however, that these first sensations, sometimes called stage fright, are of no great importance in themselves, nothing to worry about. They are vexatious, like a change in air pressure, and with some persons may even produce, temporarily, a mild panic. But there is no need to worry; the troublesome sensations almost certainly pass off with a little experience. Clever racketeers have made a great deal of money by playing up this natural embarrassment by offering “courses” that promise to free the customers from the “deadly domination of fear.” Such an offer can be made with small risk, for the cure comes of itself when the first strangeness passes. Indeed, if the process of talking to a group is approached in a sensible way, Beginner’s Embarrassment may never put in an appearance. There are, to be sure, a few persons, probably fewer than those who cannot control seasickness, who remain unable to command their powers before an audience. Yet even these, when a real occasion for speaking comes upon them, often prove fully able to meet it. Avoid the people who try to get your money by “curing” you of something which nature will attend to.

**But Bad Habits May Be Set Up.**—There is one aspect, however, of this first attack of the preoccupation

demon that may have a serious consequence, one of which the racketeers seem unaware—at least their medicine does not reach it. It is this: the embarrassment may exaggerate for the moment some physical mannerism of the speaker, some awkward characteristic of temperament or style of expression. A vehement man may become noisy under the stress of his temporary embarrassment, a slow and cautious man too slow. Then the factor of habit may take hold with undesirable results. If a man has fallen into a mannerism when first facing listeners—hesitating and “er-er-ing,” for instance—or if he has overemphasized a natural tendency to speak fast, or excitedly, or passively, he may do this again the next time he gets up, and the next, until a habit is formed, so that the peculiarity remains to mar his manner of presenting ideas long after the embarrassment that called it forth has disappeared. When veteran spellbinders hem and haw, or shout too loud, or habitually overrun their time, the reason may be merely the grip of Old Man Habit, not natural cussedness as listeners tend to think.

But those who make money by exploiting Beginner's Embarrassment seem to have no thought of such complications. Their recipe for conquering fear, bidding you merely to crowd on steam, talk louder, tell yourself you'll “make 'em listen,” amounts to focusing attention still more sharply upon your own sensations and further exaggerating any mannerisms. Their logic is like that of the old-time Mexican streetcar driver—when he came to a hill, instead of putting on another mule he put on another man with a whip! The classic appraisal of such methods is the comment of one executive upon an associate: “That course in Public Speaking changed him from a timid gentleman into a public nuisance.” The controls outlined in the chapters that follow give surer protection against Beginner's Embarrassment.

**Other Forms of Preoccupation—Carelessness.**—After the first strangeness before audiences has worn off, however, other forms of preoccupation develop that are more serious. The enemy never gives up the fight, though he can be held down by vigilance. Since we are hardly ever aware of the guise in which preoccupation manifests itself in our own case, it is hard to overcome the error without aid. Here a check-up in a group built on Speakers' Clinic lines shows its value.

Nearly all of us are guilty of plain inattentiveness to what we are doing. We become absorbed in contemplating the ideas we wish to present and forget to watch the reactions of the audience. Strangely enough, the more deeply in earnest we are about our message, the more prone we are to this fault.

**Sloppiness of Posture.**—Common signs of disregard of listeners' reactions are sloppiness of posture and awkwardness of movement before an audience. When a speaker absent-mindedly traces patterns upon the table, or rams his hands down into his back trouser pockets, or folds his arms and stares into vacancy, you may be pretty sure that his attention is directed inward, not upon his hearers. What wonder if they stop listening? Yet persons addicted to this fault are usually unaware of it.

**"Er-er-ing."**—Other evidences of careless inattention appear in a speaker's ineffective use of his voice. If you have heard someone talking in his sleep you know the queer, colorless tone, the absence of emphasis in his utterance. More often than one would suppose, a manner of utterance astonishingly like that will come from one presumed to be conveying a message to listeners. Recently, in a series of New York meetings on tax matters, a distinguished audience of attorneys and certified public accountants crowded to what was to be the high point In

the course, an address by an eminent tax attorney from Chicago. But the eminent authority, for whom hundreds of busy men had canceled their day's engagements, hurried through his paper in a voice that was colorless and almost inaudible. Apparently he had no feeling whatever of responsibility toward his audience. He made no effort whatever to *deliver* to them the package of ideas which he had come East to present.

Probably the most common aspect of this fault of careless utterance is the tendency to hesitate and "er-er" as you go. Many persons who never do this in ordinary conversation are hopeless addicts before an audience, generally without realizing the fact. It is a result of imperfectly coordinating muscle actions; the voice apparatus goes on producing sound, although the enunciation muscles have been checked while the speaker hunts for a word. When you are aiming a remark straight at me, you do not "er-er." You say what you mean in the words that come. But if you are thinking of something else while apparently talking to me—perhaps determining how far to go with a statement—the "er-er" develops. The unhappy mannerism is only too likely to become a habit; it appears in many veteran spellbinders.

**Murmuring and Mumbling.**—Many people let their voices drop at the end of a sentence, leaving the last word or two inaudible. They are thinking of the *next* statement, evidence enough that they are not at the moment thinking of uttering *this* one so that the people before them will catch it.

With some persons the fault goes deeper and renders the entire utterance almost inaudible. I recall two instances in particular. The famous Scottish scientist, Sir J. Arthur Thomson, was a victim, and so was a brilliant young research man on the staff of a machine company.

Both were men of quick, original mind, and eager to communicate their thoughts to others, but neither was able to control his muscles so as to make his voice audible to a group of listeners. Professor Thomson was a voluminous writer and was in demand for lectures in spite of ineffective delivery. The research man, however, who had so much to tell, remained for years a private in the ranks. In his case the trouble seems to have grown out of childhood impressions. His father, whom he greatly admired, talked always very softly, certain other persons whom he disliked talked too loud, and the boy developed a distaste for what seemed to him noisy tones, which was to prove a lasting handicap.

**“Train-Announcer Tones.”**—Occasionally the voice is affected in a different way; it becomes monotonously loud. I used to know a clergyman of exceptional mental gifts, whose sermons were remarkable for originality of thought and grace of language. In conversation, though he was not a talkative man, his voice was soft and very expressive, but in the pulpit he was somehow impelled to increase its volume—as one might with a radio—and pound along in a sonorous tone that was utterly unnatural, as empty of expression as a sound-truck.

**The Dangers of Over-fluency.**—In this connection, a word about the dangers of the fluent man, who by nature thinks fast. Many a quick-witted speaker, to whom words and specific details come readily, slips into the habit of seeming to dismiss too lightly matters which to most persons call for deliberate study. At a meeting to denounce the appointment of a political henchman as United States Senator from an Eastern state, one of the speakers was a young lawyer just entering public life. By usual standards his talk that night was good—good

thought, good utterance, graceful manner, easy flow of language. But the crowd of indignant citizens were not pleased. It was too *easy*, they felt, for the situation. "He wouldn't talk so smoothly if he was really mad," they said.

The handicap resting on men of quick mind and nimble tongue, when addressing audiences, is not often recognized. William Jennings Bryan once called attention to the number of men who have distinguished themselves as orators who had some speech impediment in youth—the Athenian Demosthenes heading the list. Bryan said the reason was that these men *had to go slow*; they could not, as fluent speakers do, run away from their hearers. Persons whose speech impediments extend even to stammering have actually an advantage when speaking seriously. King George of England is a notable example. His slow, earnest sentences command double attention, for everyone recognizes that they are not uttered carelessly. The difficulty of the fluent man is that most of his hearers, in any group, think more slowly than is natural for him. If the unfortunate victim of preoccupation goes faster than they can easily follow, he leaves them puzzled and often suspicious. At the very least, they think he is showing off. The man of slower pace has a much easier time with audiences. His hearers can keep up with him, and the quick thinkers among them will respect him, if his reasoning is sound, even though wishing he could move faster.

**Carelessness About Substance.**—More than that, a man of ready speech is always in danger of slipping into carelessness about his ideas or his reasoning. Clergymen, and college professors whose students must stay in the room until the bell rings, are especially prone to this error. Men of real ability too often appear content just to

stand up and pour out whatever drifts across their minds, with a disregard for listeners' convenience of which they would never be guilty in conversation. I recall an address by a gifted and eloquent Brooklyn clergyman at a church club dinner in a New Jersey town. When introduced, after the overlong preliminaries of such occasions, with six hundred men already furtively glancing at their watches, the guest of the evening arose, fixed his eyes upon the ceiling, and for a solid hour soliloquized upon his recent travels in the West, with reflections these travels had prompted regarding the state of the nation. Throughout the harangue he made not the slightest effort to connect his remarks with the men before him, nor did he take his eyes from the ceiling. Veteran of the platform though he was, that night he was worsted by the demon of preoccupation. He forgot that the question, "Why tell that to me?" is always at the back of a listener's mind.

**Misdirected Earnestness.**—The most regrettable form of preoccupation is misdirected earnestness, more serious than carelessness because it so often kills the value of a really important message. The minds of all of us, I fear, shrink at times to a one-track layout. We fail to allow for other people's different backgrounds, we pound in our message according to our own notion of logical form, fullness of detail, intensity of statement, and so on. It is a fault that is far too common among parents, teachers, clergymen, sales managers, and "all others in authority," as the prayer book phrase goes. Each of us might well take a candid look at his own score as parent or as boss of his office. When wrongheaded earnestness tramps in at the door, success in talking to audiences slips out of the window, and we commit the worst of all errors—we bore people!



This form of preoccupation is particularly harmful because it hides or distorts a speaker's personality. Clearing a free channel between your listeners and your own mind depends largely upon getting the others to regard you as not only able but as agreeable. We are impelled to pay attention if you impress us as a fellow who is keen of mind, for instance, or careful, accurate, deliberate, or dynamic, friendly and appealing, well-poised, and so on. But preoccupation with your own point of view is likely very soon to turn your asset into a handicap by leading you to overstress it. The desire to put across a point, without clearly visualizing the persons to be reached, may make a quick-thinking man move too fast or lead a serious man to hit too hard for the situation. And then comes Old Man Habit to freeze him in his error.

**"Telling the Whole Truth" Regardless of Time.**—Take, for example, the people who habitually overrun their time. I do not refer to windbags but to the many sensible persons who sin in this way. When a man gets to talking on something that interests him deeply, the fact that his hearers' powers of attention and absorption are limited is only too apt to slip out of his mind, so that he goes on to cover the case with the thoroughness he believes it warrants—and his listeners vote him a bore.

The treasurer of a New England textile firm, personally a modest gentleman, once harangued a New York dinner club for thirty-five minutes on the manufacture of cotton. Someone had brought him as a guest. His firm had made an interesting improvement in processing and he was politely invited to tell us a little about it. He took the invitation seriously and gave a detailed review of cotton manufacture and its sixty or seventy processes. I lost count, like the rest of the club, before he was half through. When at last he stopped, he apologized for

skipping three processes. The unhappy man had the fatal habit of thinking only about his message; he did not consider the conditions of transmitting it to other people.

A chairman's long-winded introduction of a speaker may spring from similar preoccupation, and not, as we are tempted to think, from shameless desire to show off. Perhaps, unskilled at presiding, and wishing the speaker to succeed, he is moved to give him a boost, with the sad result that the speaker loses ten or twenty minutes of his time and when he is at last allowed to proceed has an irritated audience facing him.

Many of us make a similar mistake with our own material; we overload it with preliminaries for fear the listeners will not understand. I once heard an officer in a downtown firm, whose tales of Western life are as fascinating as Stewart Edward White's, tell a dinner audience about a Missouri coon hunt in his boyhood. The ten-minute picture of boy life in Mark Twain's home town was admirable when he got to it. But there was a twelve-minute preamble that might have been omitted.

**Over-reticence Just as Bad.**—On the other hand, if you are by nature reticent, the demon of preoccupation may cut your talk too short. Perhaps, hating to be bored with needless detail, morbidly fearful of boring other people and knowing your message so intimately, you forget to give listeners the background they require. You dismiss with a few cryptic remarks a matter which probably took you a long time to grasp—and leave your audience uninformed and rather provoked.

Or perhaps your calling has ground into you the habit of compressing every statement to bare essentials. Nearly all the officers of a large bank for whom I once conducted a course that was whimsically called "Public

Speaking" were victims of this habit. The little "speeches" which they composed, for subsequent meetings of chambers of commerce or Rotary clubs, were as compact and bald as the memos they were constantly writing.

At an alumni dinner of my own college the president of the local society, a man whom everybody knew and liked, was a banker of many years standing, and because of his habitual caution in statement the meeting was virtually a frost. Three of the speakers were men from other towns, unknown to most of us. Nevertheless the banker-chairman introduced them, and all others on the program, in brief, factual, perfunctory sentences which put a damper on the whole affair.

Another of my friends is an engineer who has had unusual experiences, here and abroad. Before a club fireplace he will yarn by the hour. His mind is alert, curious, full of fancies. But when on his feet before a group, even before the club members whom he knows intimately, he is gripped by preoccupation. A misplaced feeling of factual responsibility freezes his talk into a labored succession of literal statements, like a worried card player scrutinizing every card before daring to put it down.

With people of this kind it is anxiety to tell "nothing but the truth" that causes the trouble, just as desire to "tell the whole truth" urges on the marathon talkers. Both types, with the best of intentions, forget their hearers and soliloquize.

**Packing Your Thought Too Close.**—There is another type in whom this misdirected earnestness is especially to be regretted. These are the people of keen, accurate mind who by nature express themselves, even in conversation, without hesitancy, in pregnant terms, and with

close-woven sequence. They have so much to give listeners, if only they could refrain from giving too much! When they face an audience their sense of responsibility often packs their talk too full. It is not bare and bald, like that of the banker-toastmaster. It may be rich in suggestion, but it demands closer attention than can be expected from any group. It may be like the discourse of Francis Bacon, the great seventeenth century scientist and Lord Chancellor of England, of whose speeches Ben Jonson, the playwright, said, "No man ever spoke more neatly, more pressly [concisely], more weightily.... His hearers could not cough, or look away, without loss." Such talking asks too much from listeners.

At a Speakers' Clinic session a man of the Lord Bacon type, partner in a great firm of certified public accountants, was called on for a talk. "I haven't thought of anything for tonight," he said. "Somebody give me a subject." Another member suggested an aspect of the "Last in, First out" cost and inventory method, then relatively new in accounting procedure. Without a moment's hesitation, the accountant got up and delivered a six-minute discourse that was as well arranged and as precisely worded as if it had been carefully written. Yet, as he said in reply to a question, he had never before discussed just that point. Most of his audience were laymen, and one of them told me afterward: "That was an amazing talk. It was perfectly clear, even to me. But if he had gone on a little longer I should have been sunk, it was so close-packed." That brilliant man had not learned to allow for the difference between his own standards of precision in statement and those of most other people. Thus he was overstressing the feature of his talking which was of greatest value to others, if properly controlled.

**Don't Be Noisy or Over-eager.**—A word here about the matter of emphasis. Preoccupation often leads deeply sincere men to over-vehemence. Strong tones, vehement language, vigorous movement—these are a natural vehicle for sincere feeling. Earnest men who can hit hard are needed everywhere. They are always in danger, however, of “shouting too long.” They forget that a continuance of loud tones, pounding gestures, and extreme statements tend to make listeners feel that a speaker has lost control of himself. In a big public meeting such exaggeration, like any other form of excitement, is enjoyed by a crowd, but it is out of place in the smaller meetings of common life in which decisions are made. Too often people who know better provoke opposition and jeopardize their cause through getting excited and failing to watch their hearers' reactions. In talking to an audience there should always be a slight suggestion of reluctance—enough to make the listeners feel that you are addressing them not from a mere desire to do so but from a sense of duty.

**But Don't Be Colorless.**—Yet the attitude of reluctance also may be carried too far. This fault appears frequently in the public manner of men in responsible positions, such as upper executives in large organizations. When such men face an audience they often talk in a manner which is almost colorless and which listeners find both ineffective and puzzling. In many cases the reason is because these men are constantly deciding important issues; their opinions command immediate obedience, and consequently they develop extreme caution in statement and manner. Without realizing the fact, they wear their office manner when addressing an outside group. They lose sight of the basic truth that listeners presume, when a man speaks up, that he does so because he cannot

keep silent, and that when he has something to impart he will try to impress it upon those before him. Possibly the ineffectual performance of the Chicago tax authority before his audience of New York accountants and attorneys, mentioned a few pages back, may have been owing to this habit of restraint.

**Over-carefulness—Notes Not Always a Safeguard.**—Finally, over-carefulness may be unwise. Two reflections of a general character may here be made. One has to do with the use of notes. Very often a man who recognizes some aspects of his tendency to forget the audience will try to guard himself by means of notes. If he can have a few cards, he thinks, to hold in his hand or lay on the table, he will at least be sure of carrying through his talk as planned, without skipping and without delay. Unhappily, this remedy is often worse than the ailment. The notes will keep you on the track you have planned in advance, but on most occasions they kill your spontaneity.

At one of the early Speakers' Clinic meetings, a man high in repute among his friends for the cost control plan he had developed in his organization outlined the basic method in a clear, simple talk of five minutes or so. On the table he had a few cards, each carrying a few penciled notes, which he turned over as he proceeded. When the other members were asked for their reactions to his remarks, one of them said: "He was reading it."

"No, I wasn't reading it," the speaker replied, "I had a few items noted down, to make sure I wouldn't forget them. That was all."

"Well," the other man said, "I thought you knew that system backward and forward so you couldn't forget it!"

The notes had cost that speaker heavily; they had put into the minds of his hearers the suspicion that he

was not sure enough of his own system to talk five minutes about it. Notes are indispensable on some occasions. Their function is to supply details when minute accuracy is necessary, and to help you hold to a time schedule. Beyond question, however, they tend to hinder you in focusing attention on the audience and following its responses.

**Controls Needed, Even by the Old Hand.**—In one way or another the demon of preoccupation is likely to plague you unless you are watchful. This prompts a second general reflection. Safety comes only through devising *controls* which constantly jog your elbow and keep you attentive to what you are doing. And you had better vary the controls from time to time, for the demon never lets up.

Years ago, when I was a young college English teacher, I knew a young Y.M.C.A. director. Recently I met him again and found that he had become a leading figure in his organization, a man of the world, who had been everywhere, and, incidentally, had faced audiences of every kind. He was interested in my story of the Speakers' Clinic, and dropped in one evening to make a little talk about his own work. To my thinking, it was admirable; the ideas, the manner of development, the bearing were those of a finished, entertaining speaker. Now that night, as the meeting was extra large, we suspended the oral comments and asked each man instead to hand me his impressions in writing, two or three sentences about each speaker. To my amazement, my friend came in for sharp criticism from several members, and for the astonishing reason that he was "too darned good!" One man wrote: "Everything he did was perfect; he made me feel that I was a different kind of animal. If there had been *something* wrong with him somewhere, I would have liked him."

When I reported the comments to my friend, we laughed over them but agreed that they had significance. He was, in fact, growing away from listeners. His taste had become overfastidious, his language too refined and graceful for a good many people. Audiences would admire him but they would be less and less likely to feel the tie of kinship. Clearing a free channel from his mind to theirs was becoming difficult.

"What shall I do about it?" he asked, "Make a few mistakes, as in a Hooven letter, to show it is handwork?"

**One Man's Solution.**—We laughed again, at his rather woeful fancy. But shortly afterward a lawyer friend told me of a political acquaintance of his own who had recourse to just such a remedy. At a recent business luncheon the lawyer had heard a talk by a man whom he had known years before in city and state affairs, a man who had been a remarkably fluent and graceful speaker. This time the politician's style was quite different. He made his points, but he hemmed and hawed almost like a beginner.

"What's happened to you, Tommy?" the lawyer asked him afterward. "I wouldn't have known you."

"I'll tell you, Joe. I found my style was getting a little stale, too high hat. So I thought I'd better pick up the earnest businessman style. And they certainly listen better."

This man had the shrewdness to see the need of devising new controls.

What controls are available? How can they be developed?



## Chapter 5

### OUTWITTING THE ENEMY—CONTROLS

William Shakespeare, in Hamlet's instructions to the Players, told actors the secret of success in their calling: "...in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness." Replace the word "temperance," here used with a sixteenth century meaning, by the modern business term "control," and we have in Shakespeare's advice to the actor tribe a directive that applies to all of us when addressing audiences. Many of the temptations noted in the preceding chapter will not reveal themselves in your first experiences with groups of listeners, but their seeds are pretty sure to be present. How can they be kept from sprouting?

**Riding the Storm.**—In all talk to a group there must be an element of earnestness, what Shakespeare calls "passion." You are in earnest about making your point, otherwise you would not speak up and bid others give you the floor. The earnestness tends to preoccupation, which hinders transmission of your message. But to eradicate the tendency toward preoccupation would eradicate your driving power. Instead, you must learn to ride the storm, to speak with all the earnestness required by the case yet keep in touch with your listeners' responses. That will call for controls. By these I mean principles of conduct that become habitual, automatic, that guard you against letting your thought veer away from listeners

and point inward. The next three chapters explain controls that are sure.

**Individual Controls.**—The details of your control scheme you must work out for yourself; the matter is personal. You will get hints from comments you may obtain on your own performance and from watching other people; but the devices you find helpful will differ from the next man's. Needless to say, whatever controls you develop must be obeyed faithfully or they will lose their usefulness; the pilot watches the channel buoys no matter how often he makes the trip; the prudent man heeds his alarm clock every morning.

**Three Universal Controls.**—Aside from individual controls, however, there are three of a general character which everyone needs to apply without relaxation. Boiled down to essentials, these three basic rules for guidance summarize the experience of men and women everywhere who have won and held listeners' attention. They have been confirmed over and over in the experience of Speakers' Clinic members. They are here presented, as employed in the Clinic, not in terms of professional pleaders, lecturers, or entertainers, but of men and women for whom "speaking" is merely one of the factors in the conduct of affairs. These three general controls are your best defense against such errors as have been noted.

The first two of them relate to your mental attitude in the stage of preparing to talk. If you neglect preparation, as too many do, you are almost certain either to talk unwisely, saying what you do not mean, or to fail to give a fair chance to a message that is really worth while.

Do not try to prepare the words, or the individual remarks; for these the method of *ad libbing* is best, just as in conversation; your words should be fresh, like your

breakfast toast. The preparation needed relates to the ideas and their organization. It is here that we are careless, most of us, most of the time. We have sense enough, as a rule, to talk only on matters of which we have some knowledge. But we too often assume that we can talk about these offhand, without pausing to check over our views and determine just what we want to say on the occasion and how it should be arranged. Handing over a bill to a taxi driver without noting whether it is a dollar or a ten-spot may be an expensive practice. To keep from doing something like that in a discussion you need Controls One and Two.

The third general control relates to your mental attitude while speaking. If you have neglected Numbers One and Two you will be unable to use Number Three to full effect. But if the others have been taken care of and you apply Number Three resolutely, you have an excellent chance, even the first time you face a group of listeners, of outwitting the preoccupation demon.

## Chapter 6

### CONTROL NO. 1—MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A MESSAGE AND DETERMINE JUST WHAT IT IS

Control Number One is something which should be a matter of course before addressing a group, but which is constantly slighted. It is this: when impelled to speak up in a group of people, make sure always that you have something in mind that needs to be said, and furthermore that you know exactly what it is. Never just "coast." Neglect of this control is one of the chief causes why so much of the talk of intelligent people in conferences and committee meetings is unsatisfactory. Whatever your object may be, whether to present a plea of prime importance, or to give listeners useful information, or just to entertain them, if you visualize it clearly and are in earnest, that fact will reveal itself somehow in your manner. Listeners will recognize your sincerity of purpose and pay attention. But if you have merely a vague impulse to "say something," keep still; you are not ready to talk, for you would be at the mercy of distracting influences and would not command attention.

**Before Addressing a Group Take Aim.**—One of the chief differences between talking to a group and conversation is that in conversation knowledge of just what you wish to say on a matter does not often come to your mind at first. You begin a casual exchange of remarks and then, as you proceed, your mind fires up. "Yes," you think, "this is something I've got to say," and a message

has taken shape for you. But when you speak up in a group, thereby bidding others keep still and let you talk, you are expected to have your message ready in mind and to talk to the point.

**Eliminating Embarrassment.**—Having clear grasp of a real message usually does away entirely with Beginner's Embarrassment. A telegraph boy can walk in anywhere without embarrassment; he knows that he is not going to be scrutinized personally; he is just carrying a message. Think of yourself as a messenger and you can stand up and address any audience, right now. At a crowded session of teachers and county agents in Virginia I once heard a talk by a soft-voiced woman from a country district that changed the course of the meeting. She was known to few of the delegates, but she saw that they were headed the wrong way. Nobody else seemed to realize the fact, and she "just had to get up," the first time she had ever done such a thing. Yet, she said later, she felt no embarrassment when getting up.

Moreover, when really in earnest and certain of the point to be made, as this quiet Southern lady was, your sense of responsibility is likely to carry throughout the talk. You are not just handing in a message; you want an answer! The head of a large firm, who is frequently called on for committee work, once said to me: "When I have to talk to a group of people I don't think of it as making a speech but as a business operation. That's what it is." The sense of responsibility tends to ward off preoccupation of every kind, and there is less danger of slipping into careless utterance or awkward posture.

**Guarding Against Perfunctoriness or Insincerity.**—Making sure that you have something which needs to be said keeps your talk from being perfunctory or insincere. In our thought about effectiveness in talking we tend to

overlook the all-important matter of sincerity of purpose. When we discover that our usual way of presenting ideas is ineffective and that we should learn to speak out, we tend to assume that what is required is more nimbleness, more fluency. So we experiment with "speaking out" when we have nothing to say. But when we do that, since the conditions of real communication do not exist, our talk is perfunctory or not quite sincere, and the fact is bound to show. Listeners sense the difference between genuine earnestness and shadowboxing.

At the first fall session of a Speakers' Clinic group, just before the War, seven men were present, all strangers. The second man up made some remarks on neutrality, a topic that was filling the newspapers. His point was ingenious, his argument ran along smoothly, his language—he was an advertising copy writer—was crisp and expressive. When he concluded, the usual query was put to the group: What did you think of it? For a moment no one replied. Then one man said merely: "It seemed to me he didn't believe what he was saying." Everybody laughed. The advertising man said, with an apologetic grin: "Well, to be frank, I didn't. I was making a case." Then they told him where the faking showed, and at the same time what there was about him which suggested that he was smart enough not to need to fake. It was a wholesome experience for all concerned.

At another Clinic meeting a visitor, the head of a company issuing business statistics, gave an instructive account of his own organization and its growth. From the first sentence it was evident that he was at home before audiences. What he had to say was good in content, well planned, well phrased. But all of us had the feeling that he had said it many times before in much the same form, probably to prospective clients, that he was reciting a set speech, delivering a monologue. Now it chanced that

only a few were present that evening and later on the visitor suddenly spoke up: "There's something I *would* like to tell you about if I'm not taking too much of your time, and get your reactions, a matter I've been looking into." Then, for seven or eight minutes, he talked to us about profit sharing as a present-day question and asked for our opinions regarding a plan lately adopted by several firms. This talk was utterly different in effect, although voice, type of language, type of arrangement were much the same as before. He was no longer talking to himself; from beginning to end his remarks were aimed directly at the men in the room—and they gave him close and respectful attention.

**A Specific Purpose.**—Control Number One enjoins you, also, to make yourself define mentally just what your purpose is, before beginning an address to a group. All of us are prone, on a topic that is familiar, to speak up earnestly but hastily. We assume that we can trust to our impulses. That is unwise. Failure to take aim exactly, deliberately, is almost certain to keep us from saying what we really mean. We are likely to talk at random, to waste time in uttering commonplaces instead of getting to the particular points of which we have special knowledge or which we wish to have considered. Satisfactory talking to a group of people requires making clear to yourself in advance why you want to speak on that matter; what is your immediate aim and your ultimate aim; what aspect of the matter you want to treat; how far you want to go. Observing this control, which is entirely within your power, is one of the conditions of making a contribution that is worth while. You should never neglect it.

Speeches that are satisfactory almost always reveal, when analyzed, that in each case the speaker had clearly

in mind a specific purpose which guided him in choosing and arranging his ideas. He was not just "coasting." The purpose varies according to the situation.

What the statistics company man desired at the Speakers' Clinic was an answer from the four men in the group, representing different lines of business, to one specific question: Is this particular profit-sharing plan really practical, granting that it has certain attractive features? Accordingly, without dwelling on the general topic, he confined his remarks to explaining the factors making for and against practicality in that one plan.

The Virginia schoolteacher avoided taking sides on the merits of the question over which the delegates were disputing; instead, she stressed the prudence of deferring decision until a committee could investigate and report.

An insurance company executive, appointed to represent his organization in a War Funds Drive, was asked to give some advice to a number of colleagues who had agreed to solicit contributions from other companies. He wasted no time in persuading the men before him of the importance of the drive—they were already convinced of that—but instead proceeded to explain how they could present the cause effectively to their prospects, telling incidents from his own experiences on similar drives which might serve as suggestions to the able men he was addressing.

A magazine editor, beginning a course of lectures on "The Graphic Arts," for men and women already employed in advertising, printing, and similar lines, gave little informative detail in his first lecture. Instead, he sought to illustrate, with the aid of pictures and other exhibits, phases of his general subject that might stimulate curiosity and prompt the persons present to enroll, in order to hear more of these items.



Henry Grady, in his dinner speech on "The New South," had the earnest desire to promote better social and business relations between the two sections of the country. He made no plea, however, for specific action, but merely tried to lead the influential Northerners at the dinner to think of the South with more cordiality and sympathy.

Before you speak, follow the example of these and other men and women who have succeeded in reaching the minds of listeners. Take aim.

**Never Talk Without a Message—Never "Coast."**—Here you may interpose a question: "Is this planning really necessary for the talking which I may have to do? It's very seldom that I would have any real message for an audience. My affairs are pretty much routine, just minor matters. Anyway, if I follow this rule I'll get mighty little practice."

Are you sure of that? In the first place, we are here considering only how to manage your powers so as to talk to other people successfully when you need to do so. If you speak only when you have something you *want* to say you will win respectful attention anywhere. Whereas perfunctoriness, talking without a message, talking at random, will be worse than useless because your standing as a person whose judgment is to be respected will suffer.

In the second place, are there not many matters coming up in conferences and small meetings on which, in conversation, you would feel impelled to speak your mind? Experiment a little. For a few weeks, at every meeting which you attend, listen to the proceedings not as a mere fellow traveler but as one sharing responsibility for results. See if there do not come to you, time after time, ideas that you really wish to contribute. The occasions

will not be major ones with life-and-death issues; fortunately, these are infrequent in any circle. But minor issues that call for clear thinking and right decision by the group, and therefore demand responsible talking, come up continually in any enterprise. Even on subjects out of your field your comments, when uttered merely as sincere reflections or inquiries, may be very useful. In such a case your message may include only a few brief statements, but if it expresses responsible thinking your associates ought to have it. Sincere discussion of minor issues is a natural springboard for all talking to audiences. It disciplines you in the readiness that perceives what an occasion calls for.

Here then is Control Number One, which is entirely within your power. Never address an audience without being certain that you have a message and always take aim when you shoot.

Don't cheapen yourself in your talking to groups. You don't want to learn merely how to float but to swim, not to chatter but to drive home worth-while ideas when necessary. On the other hand, never pass up an occasion without considering whether there is not something you should contribute. As an active member of your circle you will meet with many occasions when it is your duty to give those around you a piece of your mind. Observing Control Number One will help you discharge this duty without irritating people.

## Chapter 7

### CONTROL NO. 2—FRAME YOUR MESSAGE BEFOREHAND

Control Number Two supplements Number One; it is a second indispensable step in preparation. It involves doing consciously something that we do unconsciously, or nearly so, in the most casual conversation.

**Hunches vs. Thoughts.**—When we are moved to speak up in a meeting, or even to make a remark in conversation, the message we wish to present comes to us at first merely as a feeling or hunch, very rarely in definite words. Before it can be passed on to other people it must take form and become a thought. We look at it, see what it means, and then proceed to express it in words and actions. This process of translating hunches into thoughts goes on in the most trivial conversation, though it is then carried through at lightning speed—subconsciously, we say. For example, through the open window of your office some afternoon comes a voice calling a newspaper "Extra." Instantly your mind races through something like this: "What is it? Early editions don't mean much. I'll find out when I start home. But there may be something important—Washington, or the Street. There's my stenographer just back from lunch." And you say quietly: "Miss Jones, would you mind running down to see what's in that Extra? If it's market news get me a copy."

**Before Talking, Stop and Think.**—When, however, we have something important to communicate, we go

through the process more carefully; we stop and think. And here, when talking to an audience, Control Number Two comes in: Frame your message and a tentative line of march before beginning to talk. Define your object or message, mentally at least, in explicit words and then plan the form in which to present it.

The first glimpse of a message does not usually reveal its full meaning and what it implies. You would not compose an important letter without pausing to think over the situation. With a group of listeners you certainly need to do the same, to be sure of transmitting the message successfully, for their background is not yours and the intangibles by which they interpret words and statements may differ from your own very widely. And, on your own account, you certainly need more than that first glimpse of the message which flashed into your mind. Otherwise you may "buy a pig in a poke," as the old phrase runs; you may discover, as you talk, that the point you first thought of making will lead toward a conclusion you cannot accept.

If you dash into a matter without reflection, and attempt while talking to clarify your ideas, you give the preoccupation devil just the opportunity he is looking for. Better take a careful look around before starting. Suppose we analyze what should be done when you know in advance that you are to talk, and have plenty of time to prepare.

**Four Steps.**—The process through which the mind passes even in casual chat—generally at lightning speed—may be analyzed into several steps. For the purposes of talking to an audience Control Number Two recognizes four steps. If you know beforehand that you are to discuss a subject, you can work out these steps deliberately, somewhat as suggested below. If you must speak on the

spur of the moment, running swiftly through them mentally must suffice. But never allow yourself to begin addressing a group of listeners without applying this four-step control.

**Defining the Message.**—First, define your message, already determined by Control Number One, in explicit words. Here are some definitions constructed by Speakers' Clinic members to guide them in developing talks that averaged about ten minutes in length:

To review the government's conflict with the utility companies and emphasize the injustice of the government attitude.

To describe, in terms of physics, what happens when you "see" a motion picture.

To arouse indignation against our local property tax laws.

To tell laymen how to avoid fire hazards in connection with Christmas tree lighting.

If you have plenty of time, try the method a publisher often employs in the difficult operation of naming a book; write down rapidly all the ways of stating your message in a single sentence that occur to you, one after the other. Most of them your mind will discard at once, but the systematic listing will bring to light a few that will be suggestive. It will also reveal possible misinterpretations of the message as it first popped into your mind, and suggest ways of avoiding them. The chief value of it is that it induces an attitude of caution, which will carry over to the far more numerous occasions when you must talk without previous notice.

**Lay Out a Path.**—Second, lay out a path for presenting the message. This should not be a solid roadway but just a line of points—a series of stepping-stones. After

having defined the message, you arrange, tentatively, a line of steps that leads up to it. Then, to check your reasoning, start at the *end* of this series and *work back* to your opening. That is a device which old hands have found very helpful; it enables you to spot essential points and strike out detours.

Here is an example of arranging and rearranging points, worked out by an executive of the W—— Company in preparation for a talk to his associates in the management. Early in the War this company faced the problem of what to do with its salesmen. This was the situation:

The W—— Company had two types of product: one a simple low-cost article sold in quantity at a small rate of profit; the other consisting of special applications of the basic product that were sold in smaller lots but at a much higher rate of profit. The restrictions of the war program put a stop to the company's second lines. How was the company to carry its salesmen, whose attention had been given almost wholly to the profitable lines, now out of production? This executive wished the company to undertake a re-education of its salesmen, men of middle age, who had been earning handsome salaries by selling the profitable lines but who now must transfer to the low-cost line if they were to make a living.

The speaker planned a conference talk for his associates, working *backward* from his conclusion, somewhat as follows:

Message: We should give our salesmen such training as may be necessary to enable them to adjust themselves to successful selling in today's market.

Why? Because most of them cannot make the necessary adjustment unaided.

Why? Because it involves their learning a new technique of selling, after many years concentration on a different type of work.

Why? Because they must now undertake quantity selling of our simple low-cost line, at a low rate of profit for the company and themselves.

Why? Because the high-profit special lines on which the company's efforts and their own have been centered are no longer available.

He then rearranged the material for presentation, working *forward*, in four steps, as follows:

1. The company faces the problem of carrying the sales force in an unfavorable market, or of letting them go—a loss to the company and an injury to the men.
2. Since the profitable lines, on which both company and salesmen have been concentrating, cannot be produced, we have available only the original low-profit line, which must be sold in quantity, a type of sales effort very different from the one we have encouraged.
3. But our salesmen, having focused attention for years on the special lines, do not know how to sell the low-profit line. They must learn a new sales technique, which will be very difficult at their age and in view of the character of their experience.
4. Therefore, since the salesmen's difficulty is largely the result of company policy, and since it is important to retain our sales force, we should undertake the task of retraining them for quantity selling of our low-profit line.

When time permits, instead of merely laying out a single path, lay out two or three, following different routes to the same destination, the message. Just as when working up the definition, you are likely to get better results from jotting down several possible arrange-

ments than from laboring over a single path. Finally, group the steps under three or four main headings and drop the subpoints, as such, from separate mention. Talks that run over fifteen minutes may require more steps but subdividing is always hard for listeners to grasp and hard for the speaker to remember, which is another opening for the preoccupation demon. The first step, by which you enter the "path," is of least importance so far as Control Number Two is concerned.

**Plan the Time.**—Third, determine the time your talk is to take, and fit your line of march into this period. In conversation we rarely if ever plan the length of our remarks, but in a talk to a group it is all-important to know how much time you will occupy. Orderliness and completeness depend upon it. When writing, you build a statement very differently, according to whether it is to be a two-page memo, a fifty-word night letter or a ten-word telegram. So with a talk. You may discover that the message as conceived and laid out will require a half hour to cover, whereas you should take only ten minutes. Better do your cutting beforehand, not after beginning to talk; you will make a happier impression upon your hearers. The orderliness resulting from a well-built time schedule is something listeners can recognize. They feel that you have your thoughts under command, that you are not being swept along by excitement, and this impels them to listen respectfully.

Knowing how long you can dwell on a point is a powerful defense against detours and other effects of preoccupation. One of my friends was asked to give the principal address at the annual meeting of his professional society. He was assigned an important technical subject, which would require an hour or so for proper treatment. He was a ready speaker in the give and take of conferences



but had little experience with a long speech—the “mile-run” as he termed it.

My friend did not write the speech or try to prepare the wording. He laid out a path, however, very carefully—the successive propositions to be advanced, the development material for each of them, and a number of stories for relief. Then he talked it all through several times, by himself, sampling different routes and keeping track of the time required for each point and for the entire talk.

When he met the audience he had with him a few small cards, which he laid on the table. On each of them one of his points was noted in a few words, written large, together with the *time in minutes* when that point should be ended. He laid his watch beside the cards, setting it at the even hour. The total time he had allowed himself was 55 minutes. Actually the speech took 63 minutes, but the extra time went into two points where the listeners' reactions showed that fuller treatment was needed. The other points were covered in the time he had scheduled. His speech was an outstanding success, partly at least because of his applying, in essentials, this Control Number Two.

**Frame a Closing Sentence.**—Fourth, fix up a closing sentence, in definite words. Having this in mind puts a light at the end of your path. And if you plan the close beforehand, you can be sure of saying what you mean, with the emphasis and shading you desire. If you wait and trust to building the concluding statement on the run at the end of your remarks, you are likely to omit some element of the message and thereby give it a wrong slant. Very likely you will overstress the last item discussed. Of course you may desire to modify the closing sentence, when you get to it, but you will do that with your eyes open, not inadvertently.

When this four-step process was outlined to one of the Speakers' Clinic members he said: "Why, that's about what I always do before an interview with the Chief. I outline what I want to cover, in a memo, and then tear the memo up. Only this four-step scheme is better, especially figuring the time."

Do not carry the planning too far. Do not prepare definite words except for the closing sentence and perhaps, in a long talk, the opening or closing sentence of each main point. If analysis goes too far your talk will lose spontaneity; what you say will not fit the situation of the moment. It will also invite preoccupation, for you will be trying to remember details of the prearranged order, or some especially clever bit of wording. The fact is that as regards both words and detail ideas you can generally trust your mind to function *better* after the engine is warmed up in the course of talking. Giving it the responsibility for so doing is another anchor to keep you from drifting into preoccupation.

**In Short-Notice Talking—Mental Planning.**—We have been considering the process of Framing the Message when there is plenty of time before you must talk. Quite naturally you may remark: "Yes, a fine program if I have a week to work up a speech. But what if I must talk at a moment's notice, which is my situation generally? What then?"

Well, then you should go through this very process, and in the same order, *mentally*. Define the message; lay out a path; determine the time; frame a closing sentence, all in your head. If the subject is familiar (and unless it is, *do not talk*) two or three minutes will suffice for a swift preview, supposing that is all the time you can get. But even though you write nothing down, make yourself do your planning *in explicit words*. That is an essential for Control Number Two.

It can be done. It is being done constantly, in all kinds of meetings, by people who have learned in one way or another how to talk with audiences. They may never have rationalized their methods, but the hard school of experience has taught them to follow some such process as here outlined.

Here is an instance from a Speakers' Clinic meeting just before the United States entered the war. A prominent Wall Street lawyer had been sent to Paris and then to Berlin for an important business inquiry. On his return, at a dinner given him by a few of his Wall Street friends, he told them about his experiences in Portugal, Spain, France, and Germany—a detailed and deeply interesting story that held them closely attentive for nearly two hours. It chanced that there was a Speakers' Clinic meeting next night, and one of the members, who had attended the dinner, was asked if he could give an idea of what the lawyer had told them. After waiting a moment he got up and summarized the lawyer's long narrative in some fourteen minutes. It was not a cold outline but a miniature of the whole, with specific detail and colorful incidents. He had framed it, mentally, in the moment or two of reflection. This man was not a spell-binder, not a fluent talker, but he had developed the ability to look swiftly through his mental storeroom and then swiftly select and arrange the material he needed.

Planning a talk mentally is an art in which it is entirely possible to train yourself. It is only carrying further what you now do in the course of an important interview, when the other man says something which calls for a careful and perhaps detailed answer. Your mind flashes rapidly through the very process just described, very likely including a determination of the time you should allow yourself to get the best result. In a few

seconds you begin a reply, in which you know beforehand where you are going.

What will Control Number Two accomplish? First, it will give further protection against Beginner's Embarrassment; having a definite line of march in mind enables you to get right to work. Secondly, knowing the route to be taken and the time for the trip, you are much less likely to ramble, to talk too long, or to break off abruptly before clinching your case.

## Chapter 8

### CONTROL NO. 3—WATCH YOUR LISTENERS AND TALK TO THEM ONE BY ONE

Controls One and Two serve to get you ready, so that when the tug comes you will be less open to temptation to forget listeners and talk to yourself. But, when actually engaged in the "torrent, tempest and whirlwind of your passion," you need Control Number Three to guard against beguilement by fancies of the moment—against red herrings across the trail. It will help you with the very first audience you face. And, once you have formed the habit of applying it, you will become as nearly immune to the preoccupation devil's poison as is possible for frail human nature.

**Eyes on Listeners.**—From the moment you get up, keep your eyes on the people in front of you. Watch actively for their responses. That helps to guard you against talking to yourself, because it creates in part the conditions of conversation. In conversation there is always the other man to call your mind back if it wanders from the point. He keeps flagging you; he interrupts. Similarly, in talking to a group, if you pay close attention you can catch similar responses, recognizable though unvoiced, in listeners' faces and manner—questions, challenges, invitations to develop a point. The problem is, how to make yourself remember to watch for these responses. Controls One and Two can free you from the distraction of trying to determine, while talking, what it is that you ought to say, but that is not enough. Every

son of Adam, not to mention Eve's daughters, is open to the temptation to soliloquize when he has the floor, like the Brooklyn clergyman in the Jersey church club.

**Talk to Individuals.**—What can you do to make sure of watching the listeners? Merely resolving not to forget is as futile as resolving not to fall asleep; you slip into soliloquy unaware. We need an alarm clock, every one of us. Try this one. Break up the group into individuals and *talk to them one at a time*. As soon as you do that you establish essentially the same relationship as in conversation. People say sometimes: "I can't look at any one person when I'm up before an audience; it confuses me; I lose the thread of what I'm saying." One who says this is evidently not talking to audiences at all but only delivering a monologue. Spotting individuals and establishing communication channels between your mind and theirs is all-important. The following suggestions apply equally well, whether you are addressing a small group or a roomful.

**A First-Aid Formula.**—When you begin to talk, look at some one in the group and make a remark to him. Whether it relates to your message or not does not matter; in a business call your first remark is not, usually, about the object of your business. Say something that might interest a stranger for a moment—even the weather may serve—and then *wait for a flash of response*. You may get a response from several persons, each of whom will think he is the one addressed. Remember, in that first moment all are attentive; they are curious as to what you say or do.

Follow with another remark growing out of the first, answering the approval or challenge in the face that caught your eye. That will bring other faces into your

view, and in some of these also you will catch a response of some sort. Turn to one of these and say something leading toward your message. By this time a number of persons have been roused by your glance and your direct address and are actively listening—for the moment at least. What you say on your topic will get a reaction from some of them.

People in other parts of the room will prick up their ears, from curiosity, when they see others listening. Accordingly, turn your eyes elsewhere for your next remark. Gradually you can cover all parts of the room and get the whole audience listening as you develop your message. Turn your gaze from one point to another as you talk, looking at one group for a few sentences, if addressing a roomful, or at one person if engaged in a conference with a few people around a table. This method of moving attention from point to point, always waiting a moment for response, is used constantly by the old hand. Try it, just as here described, the next time you face a group of listeners. You will find that it works, with a dozen people or with a roomful. Even if you have never faced an audience before you will find that you can draw the attention of a group after you as surely as you can make a kitten follow a string drawn slowly across the floor. Just watch the faces and feed in your ideas bit by bit. Doing this will guard you against preoccupation.

**Keeping Touch.**—Now you see the reason for the remark of a few pages back that the opening statement of a talk is of no great importance. What is important at the start is to turn spectators into listeners. After you have them in tow you can lead them. But do not take your eyes from their faces.

Do not worry too much about logical sequence in these first addresses to audiences. Very likely the route you

find yourself traversing will differ more or less from the one you had mentally laid out. Never mind. So long as the faces show understanding and a degree of approval you know that your treatment fits into their thought-stream. If they are following you, and if you know where you want to land them at the close, you may trust to your common sense to make the progress logical. Possibly the route you follow when guided by audience responses will rest on a sounder logic than the road you had laid out in private.

**Letting Them Rest.**—What if they stop responding? Well, it may be that a particular point puzzles them, or stirs opposition. Stop there for a moment and try to clear up the difficulty. If they still fail to respond satisfactorily, drop the point and turn to another; it is hardly ever wise to fight with an audience. Your next point may please them and make up for the temporary check. It is not necessary that every point shall register. One seed is enough to start growth.

**Examples—Stories.**—Or it may be that they are tired. Four or five minutes of close attention to any item is about all that a general audience can give without a rest. Let them catch their breath. Tell a story that bears on your point, or give a concrete example that has the effect of a story. Or just pause as you end a passage and sum up by saying: "This is the road we have covered. Here is where we are. Over there is where we are headed." Old hands, wise in the ways of listeners, take care to put in plenty of such road signs.

**Questions.**—Or just haul off and fire one or two questions at them, real questions that invite answer, and *wait for the answer*. Here and there faces will light up. Then, as you fill in the answer yourself, you will see heads nod-



ding in assent. Asking questions is one of the best ways of holding attention. But always give them a chance to answer. If some of your hearers actually speak out in meeting, so much the better; it makes the relationship more real. Do not stop to argue if interrupted in this way; just acknowledge the comment and go on. If you are inexperienced before audiences, arguing with listeners may throw you out of your path. But bear in mind that in a round-table conference there will, of course, be interruption, so why not in a speech to an audience?

In short, just watch individuals here and there throughout the room and hand them your message bit by bit, as responses shown in face or manner give you suggestions. It is a method that nearly all who are really skilled in talking to groups of listeners have acquired, consciously or unconsciously. They have become sensitized to listeners so that their minds adjust themselves automatically to audiences of differing character and mood.

**Sensitized to His Audience.**—I recall hearing a man address four different groups in the same small city within twenty-four hours. He was a business man, active in social work and labor relations. He had been invited to address an evening session of a large labor union convention. When his coming was known, the Rotary Club asked him to speak at its luncheon meeting, the Woman's Club secured him for an afternoon talk, and the high-school principal persuaded him to address the morning assembly before his train left next day.

The four speeches, three of them extemporaneous, were very different, although they all carried the general message he had come to deliver. At the Rotary meeting he gave a hearty inspirational talk, full of stories, and brief. The Woman's Club talk, also brief, was graceful in form, serious but not heavy, with a single human-

interest story at the close. The evening address before six hundred labor men and women was full of vigorous thought, with a few stories woven into the argument, and was delivered with rugged energy. The talk at the high school was just an informal chat—a reference to his own son and the boy's basketball aspirations, remarks on a recent visit to a noted school in New England, a very short inspirational passage, and a closing story that set all the youngsters laughing.

This man used his head when he talked. With him, you could see, every speech was an adventure for himself as well as for his audience. You listened to him not only for what he had to tell but because you felt that he was telling it to *you*. As a result, you received something that went far beyond the particular idea he was stating. He made an impression of competence, which led you to trust him, and of considerateness, which led you to like him.

**Tapping Listeners' Minds and Feelings.**—The suggestions you obtain from audiences stimulate you to talk better than otherwise would be possible for you. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in a famous passage, said that an orator "plays upon his audience as an organist plays upon his instrument." But that statement ignores the other half of the relationship between speaker and listener; the truth is that the audience in its turn plays upon, inspires, and guides the speaker. Why not try from the first moment of your first talk, by watching the faces before you, to tap the never-failing reservoir of suggestions from the other end of the channel of communication? If you can remember not to become too absorbed in presenting your view, listeners' faces will give you signals that help you express your thought more fully and more appropriately.

**Keep Track of Time.**—Remember always, however, to keep track of the time. Do not wear out your welcome,

no matter how pleasant the visit. Have your watch where you can see it, and look at it. Finish in the time you have set. Jump to your conclusion regardless of how much material you may have to discard. If you have been focusing upon individuals it will be easier to do this; you can see how to go cross-lots, as in conversation. If your audience is following attentively, you may get your message through without covering the full pattern of presentation which had seemed necessary before you and the audience had met. Your object is to get results; the method is secondary. Observing Control Number Three, keeping eyes and mind on the individuals before you all the time, will do more than anything else to carry you to the port for which you set your course by means of Controls One and Two. This third control will protect you against carelessness and rambling, against misdirected earnestness, against overcarefulness that chokes spontaneity.

**What First Aids Can Do for You.**—These First-Aid suggestions will enable you to get by, even if you must face an audience or a conference group tomorrow without ever having made a speech before. Provided, first, that the topic you discuss is one with which you are familiar and about which you have a definite opinion, and secondly, that you try honestly to apply the general principle and the three general controls that have been explained. Your first talks may lack smoothness, and you may appear nervous, but you will deliver your message. You will also command the listeners' respect, and probably no one will think of you as a beginner. On later occasions you will do better. Holding to these First Aids will enable you right now, with your present expression apparatus, to handle successfully the talking required of you. Give them a test.

## Chapter 9

### CONDITIONING YOURSELF THROUGH GOOD HABITS

Your picking this book up in the first place suggests that you were not looking for a treatise to read but for a road map to use. The preceding First-Aid chapters have given you what men and women who succeed in reaching audiences have found to be the essentials: Chapter 3, the course to steer; Chapter 4, rocks and shoals to avoid; Chapters 6 to 8, the three controls to keep you on the mark. So, when you have read this far, my suggestion would be to lay the book aside and try out what has been told you. Perhaps that will be all you need. If a few doses cure your cold, why finish the bottle? If you never open the book again, I think you will agree that getting these workable suggestions from old hands has been amply worth while.

However, if your experience is like my own, you are likely to discover that, while the rules of the game of communicating ideas—as with any important activity—are few and easily grasped, the “know how” is something else again. Then you are likely to desire further help, so as to make the most of a situation. At times you score a ten-strike, but at other times the result is not so good. What is the reason? What can you do about it? When that stage comes, pick up the book again and see what more the old hands have to say.

**Adding Skill to Intelligence.**—What the expert in any line will tell you is this: To be certain of turning out a

reliable performance with minimum effort whenever called upon, you should condition yourself systematically. Back in Chapter 2 it was pointed out that accessory features have their part in full success when addressing other people—not only sound ideas but also smooth arrangement, clear form of statement, ready command of language, voice, appearance. Now is the time to give attention to these accessories. Like the technique of a musician or a golfer, they enable you to execute automatically what your mind thinks of doing. That means, they make it easier for you to keep open that free channel to listeners' minds.

In John Buchan's amusing novel, *John Macnab*, there is an illuminating account, by a writer who was himself a master of public address, of how an experienced public man can utilize these accessories in an emergency. The hero, a British Cabinet minister, is called upon for a speech to a large audience at a time when he is physically and mentally weary, as well as out of touch with recent news. His skillful comment on current topics, brightened by the resources of voice, appearance, and language, holds the audience spellbound. The accessories partially compensate for defects or lapses in the main appeal. No man can strike twelve every hour. On occasions when your case is not as strong as you would like, yet has to be presented, your effect will be helped by interesting wording, a good voice, and expressive manner.

**Conditioning Takes Time but Is Sure.**—All these factors, however, involve the formation of habits. They cannot become tools at once, by act of will, any more than a runner can extemporize leg muscles or lungs. But you can develop command of them all, in time. People who repeatedly face audiences always pick up a degree of command of these accessories, although that hit-or-miss

method picks up faults along with good features, as was true of Billy Sunday, Huey Long, even Al Smith. There is a surer method, through private practice between times.

**Systematic Practice.**—Amateur musicians give themselves regular practice. A Johns Hopkins surgeon has told of the hundreds of hours he spent in practicing tying the knots required in operations. However strange the practice drills in the following pages may seem at first, the reward they bring is worth all the effort. Instead of having to “pass a miracle” whenever you face a group of listeners, you will get results automatically, like John Buchan’s Cabinet minister, through the authority of proper voice and bearing and sure taste in presenting details. Unconsciously but surely your manner of formulating ideas, all day long, will be modified as you discover more excellent ways. Yet the changes will not alter your personality. Like a man who has gone through army training, you will function better but you will be the same man. We in America have had an outstanding example of the results of conditioning in our own generation.

In the spring of 1921 a man, still young, recently Assistant Secretary of the Navy and a candidate for Vice President of the United States, addressed an audience of students at the Brooklyn Y.M.C.A. As he waited in the wings before going on, he chatted with the Chairman of the Lecture Committee about audiences. “I have found out,” he said, “that merely handing out information to an audience is useless. You must learn to adapt your presentation to the people before you, make it interesting to them.” Years before I had heard Franklin Roosevelt speak, not particularly well, at the Saturn Club in Buffalo, while he was leading the fight in the New York Legislature against Tammany’s effort to make “Blue-eyed Billy” Sheehan United States Senator. In 1933, when he

delivered his Inaugural Address as President, bringing courage and hope to an unhappy nation, he had been conditioning himself for thirty years. He had developed a skill in talking plainly and interestingly to plain people, second only to that of Abraham Lincoln. But he was the same man as in those early days in the Legislature and the Navy Department.

**A Regular Program.**—In order to condition yourself, get some regular private practice once a week, and oftener if possible. Close the door and give yourself a systematic workout for half an hour, following some program like this:

1. Begin by running through some of the exercises described in Chapters 10 and 11 to limber up your muscles.
2. Then set yourself a topic and frame a message for a particular group on a subject that you know well. Visualize the persons you intend to address and their probable reactions to what you have to say on the topic.
3. Then stand up and deliver a speech to that group of imaginary listeners. Try to apply, as you talk, some particular aspect of the technique explained in the pages that follow. And always *observe the conditions of actual address to listeners*. That is, go straight through when once you start. If you get off the track, keep talking and work around to the point again, as you would have to do before an audience. Keep attention on your imaginary listeners, imagine their response to point after point, and carry through according to Control Number Three, finishing with your prearranged closing sentences and in the time you had set. Such private practice in "running the distance" is a tremendous help when you get up before an actual group for a five-minute, ten-minute, or half-hour talk. Do this time after time, week after week, taking a different topic on each occasion.

4. Frequently, instead of composing a talk of your own, try reading aloud, on your feet, some speech that has caught your attention in a newspaper or a house organ. Trying to render with proper expression the remarks of an experienced speaker will always give you suggestions for your own talking.
5. Finally, after talking or reading, take a few minutes to consider coolly how you succeeded and what your score was.

In addition to the regular practice, make a habit of grading the speakers you hear at meetings or over the radio. Notice the methods they employ and the results they obtain. Jotting down brief notes of how they impress you will double the value of such observation and will gradually build up a reliable basis for scoring. For your comfort let me say that such close and candid observation of other speakers is likely to reassure you about your own performance.

**Lines of Conditioning—Appearance, Voice, Language.**—The following pages discuss the three main groups of accessory factors: Appearance—what you look like; Voice and Utterance—what you sound like; Use of Language—words, sentences, and sentence groups.



## Chapter 10

### IMPROVING YOUR APPEARANCE

As the first step in conditioning yourself for talking to audiences, take stock of your appearance. Listeners' eyes are sizing you up at every moment of your talk. If you look like a person to be respected, people are more likely to listen and your task is easier.

**Physical Composure—Poise.**—A speaker's appearance should express composure. It should be free from fidgeting, slouch, or unnatural rigidity. In conversation, if we sprawl about or fidget nervously, the fault may not be noticed because other people do likewise. But when we stand before a group these mannerisms make trouble. Listeners, however careless themselves, subconsciously notice clumsiness and disapprove. In a young speaker such mannerisms suggest inexperience and therefore lack of competence. In one who is older and presumably experienced, they suggest personal crudeness and lack of respect for listeners. For every one of us, it is safe to say, this matter of appearance calls for systematic self-training.

**Mannerisms to Avoid.**—Here are a few of the mannerisms of posture or movement often exhibited by speakers. Who among us, I wonder, can read the list without a twinge of guilt? If you were to ask a candid friend to watch your appearance the next time you address a group of listeners and tell you what he sees, you might be horrified.

**FEET AND LEGS.** Are you in the habit of standing with knees bent, like a tired old horse? Many people stand like that, quite unaware of the fact. Or they rest their weight back on one heel, with the other leg stretched out. Such poses suggest feebleness or else abstraction.

Or do you nervously shift your weight from foot to foot? At a bankers' convention a bored newspaper man in the front row, roused to morbid scrutiny by the foot movements of a New York magnate who was droningly reading a dull speech, began to count. The banker's face was expressionless as usual, but his feet betrayed his nervousness. During his forty-minute reading he shifted his weight four hundred and twenty-five times.

Do you pace restlessly back and forth while talking? Or are you glued to one spot, moving neither feet, body nor arms?

**LEANING ON THE TABLE.** A great many people feel impelled to lean on the table, or on a chair back, or against the wall. In the stage of Beginner's Embarrassment they were impelled to hold on to something and a habit developed. They do not realize what they look like. I recall a workers' meeting during a Hospital Drive. The chairman was a giant with a big, hearty voice. In front of him was one of those little folding card tables. When the big man rose to give his pep talk to the three hundred workers in the Drive, he bent down, rested both hands on the rickety table, and delivered his talk on all fours. "What he told us," people said afterward, "was fine, but he looked like the Sam Hill."

**HANDS AND ARMS.** What to do with his hands bothers nearly every imperfectly conditioned speaker. So he hooks them behind his back, or parks them in his pockets. You can often see a spasmodic wiggle of elbows

when, without realizing it, he has an impulse to move the parked hands in a gesture. Or he hides one hand in a pocket and with the other absently traces patterns on the table. Or he waves his arms continuously in wide sweeps. Or he folds them, a most inappropriate pose for one presumably eager to deliver a message. Strangely enough, the most natural pose, with arms hanging loosely at the sides to move freely now and then in acting out a thought, seems unnatural to the unconditioned speaker, especially if he spends his days at a desk.

**STROKING FACE; WIPING MOUTH; CLEARING THROAT.** Are you addicted to massaging your face or head in conversation, pulling nose or ear or chin, constantly wiping brow or mouth with your handkerchief, clearing your throat every few minutes? You are only too likely to do the same before an audience. I recall a dinner speech by the head of a leading company, a logical, stimulating, well-worded discussion, but with sudden shifts to grotesqueness as the speaker again and again absently raised his hand to draw his finger across his upper lip, below his nose.

The minister of a large church was a victim of his handkerchief. At three-minute intervals throughout his sermons he took the handkerchief from his pocket, folded and patted it, drew it across mouth and forehead, patted it again and stowed it away. In three minutes out it came again. Members of his congregation spoke to him about the odd performance and he tried to stop it, but vainly; it had become a habit.

**Setting-Up Exercises.**—Eliminating such mannerisms at once, by act of will, is impossible. They have become muscle habits. Yet you can free yourself from them if you really try to do so. You must get at the seat of the

trouble by training your muscles, building up *good* habits. That takes time, but it can be accomplished by means of simple exercises.

By nature, the entire human body is an expression medium. In little children it fulfills this function well; children are unconsciously graceful and dramatic. As we grow up we slip into bad habits of slouching, fidgeting, or rigidity, because of shyness or laziness or, too often, because of unwise repression on the part of parents or teachers. Whatever the reason, by the time we reach maturity our expression medium is a pretty poor instrument. In training a professional actor one indispensable first step is to relax his stiff, clumsy body so that expression impulses flow through it freely.

**Remedying Clumsiness.**—One hot June night at the Speakers' Clinic the men peeled off their coats. They looked clumsy. Several were potbellied. One man remarked with a shamefaced grin: "We'd better not do this again. We look like a lot of hicks!" Another replied: "Seems to me we'd better do it every time and see if we can't improve." The easy erectness of one man who had kept himself fit with handball and boxing gave a suggestion of what all might attain.

If you will practice even the simple exercises outlined below, continuing them systematically for a few weeks or months, they will give you a body that will help, not hinder, when you face audiences. You will probably devise additional exercises for yourself. The result will be, not to make you theatrical or sissy, but to free you from the acquired and *unnatural* clumsiness that mars your talking by making you "look funny."

**Exercise 1.**—Talking to an audience stimulates your physical energy, which acts on your muscles. With prac-

ticed speakers this extra energy vents itself properly in expressive movements and gestures. With beginners it exaggerates the tendency to fidget or slouch, or makes them stiffen up. You need to find a vent for this surplus energy.

You may have heard that holding on to something will relieve you. The suggestion is good, but gripping the furniture, or a pencil or roll of manuscript, leads only to greater awkwardness. There is a better way: *hold on to the floor with your toes!* Press down slightly with your toes all the while, as you talk. Standing is an automatic action with most of us, and we give it no conscious attention. But trying to "feel" the floor with your toes as you talk will drain off the surplus energy without showing the effort.

This little device will go far toward counteracting the everyday habits of careless posture which cause trouble when one faces an audience. Eventually it will give you better poise of your body all day long, which is what you really need. Pressing down with the toes holds the leg muscles firm, giving the body a solid foundation. It tends to keep your feet near together, which itself improves your appearance. It also improves the poise of body and head, resulting in an attitude that is not the stiff erectness of a soldier at attention, but the easy erectness of an athlete poised for movement, or of a good dancer. With the body poised thus, you will discover that your arms tend to hang loosely at your sides without the position's feeling queer.

To attain this posture, apply Exercise Number One in your private practice:

Stand up, with heels together. Rise on your toes, poise there for a few seconds, and then slowly lower your heels until they touch the floor, but still keep your weight on

the toes. Repeat this action several times, always slowly. You are now "feeling the floor" with your toes, in the right position for talking. You can move trunk, arms, and head instantly, as the thought you are uttering may suggest.

A college instructor in psychology, who visited the Speakers' Clinic several times, bears testimony to the effectiveness of this simple exercise. At his first visit his remarks, thoughtful and well-phrased, were marred by the impression of sloppiness, almost of physical weakness, in his posture. He slouched back against the wall; he teetered on one foot, with the other on a chair; he leaned both hands on the table, like the big chairman of that Hospital Drive. The other men took him bluntly to task. "What's the matter with you? Are you sick?" they asked. "You're a strong young man. Why do you have to slouch like that?" The young man owned, sheepishly, that in spite of some years of teaching he had never overcome the impulse to hold on to something while talking.

The suggestion of holding on to the floor with his toes interested him. He returned to the Clinic two weeks later to show that the slouch was gone. His legs were as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. "I can stand up in my classes now," he said, "and I certainly feel better."

**Exercise 2.**—And now something for your hands. When your body is properly poised, after the up-and-down exercise, your hands hang limp at your sides. But when you begin to talk to an audience the arm and hand muscles may tend to stiffen up so that you find them in the way. It is possible to relax these muscles consciously.

Rise on your toes and drop down, as in Exercise Number One. Your hands will now hang loosely at your sides. Now *shake* your hands as they hang there, flopping them loosely on the wrists, first one hand and then the other.

You know the limp, relaxed feeling of one's muscles when waking from a sound sleep. Relax fingers and hands by shaking them until they have such looseness.

Now do the same with the arms, first the forearm, flopping it on the elbow, and then the whole arm, swinging it loosely on the shoulder to shake all the stiffness out of it.

Now deliver a little speech to one of the imaginary audiences of your practice periods. See if you do not retain, for a time at least, the easy, relaxed feeling in arms and hands. After you have used this exercise for several days, you will retain the relaxation for a lengthening period.

After practicing Exercise Number Two for a while you will discover that you can relax your muscles without preliminary flopping of hands and arms. Then, when about to address an audience, or when you pause in a talk to let a point sink in, press down your toes and relax your arms. Doing this will bring back the attitude of easy, supple erectness in which your body is ready to respond to impulses to *act out* your ideas.

**Gestures.**—For now, while poised in this way, you will feel impulses to move your head, to swing your arms in a gesture; that is, to dramatize or act out your thought. Yield to these impulses. It is unnatural for anyone to stand stock still for several minutes while talking. It makes listeners feel that he is talking automatically.

Movements of arms and hands are among the chief sources of worry for the unconditioned speaker, especially when he has to deliver an extended address to an audience of some size. He feels, vaguely, that gestures are expected but does not know how to make them. He does not want to make gestures, and if he attempts it he feels foolish. His dislike is natural and proper. No one should

ever "make" a gesture, in the sense of sticking it into a talk deliberately and mechanically. And yet, such movements of arms and hands and trunk are a part of our common expression procedure. In lively conversation everyone spontaneously moves his hands now and then, just as he smiles, frowns, or shakes his head. As the posture of easy erectness becomes habitual, you will find yourself illustrating your talk with gestures without thinking of it, almost unaware of what you are doing.

Here are a few hints that will aid your conditioning. Gestures should be full and strong, not mere abortive buds of movement. They are prompted, when spontaneous, by extra earnestness at some point in your talk, a desire to reinforce what your words are saying. Do not let these movements of emphasis contradict themselves by being made timidly or stiffly. While speaking, you cannot, of course, interrupt your thought to plan how to move body or arms in a gesture. But you can use your practice periods to limber up your muscles—just as you acquire erectness—so that when the impulse comes to move arms or head or body in a gesture the movement will be suitable and free. One point to bear in mind is that when standing up, spontaneous arm movements pivot on the shoulder, whereas when seated only the hand and forearm are commonly used. If you are accustomed to spend most of your time at a desk, when before an audience you are likely to employ only the hand and forearm movements that are habitual for you when seated. That is one reason for the abortive wiggles of the hands of an inexperienced speaker, even when the hands are parked in his pockets.

Impulses to move the arms come from desire to emphasize a thought. You may wish to impress a logical point or to describe, to picture, a scene. In either case



the movement should be free and strong, not stiff and jerky. It will affect to a degree the poise of the entire body. It will certainly affect all the muscles of arm and hand, even down to the finger tips. If your hand remains limp and half-closed when you have swung your arm to emphasize a point, the listeners will feel—though they may not know why they do so—that the gesture is “queer,” not fully spontaneous, not “natural.” Act out your thought fully.

**Aid from the Looking Glass.**—To get an idea of how muscle action is coordinated when gestures are spontaneous, made on impulse, try this experiment. Fix up two mirrors in your room at home, if possible one of them full length, with the second mirror at such an angle that you can peek at yourself, when standing up, without facing your eyes. At night, or when convenient, peel off your clothes and in Greek statue guise make a little speech, on a topic into which you can throw earnest feeling. After getting well started, glance in the second mirror and see what your hands are doing. The chances are that you will catch them in spontaneous gestures, and you will see how the poise of your body shifts with every movement of arms or hands. When you swing an arm forward, for example, your trunk pivots slightly backward, to balance your weight. Repeating this experiment from time to time will reveal to you that your entire body, like that of everyone else, is in truth a medium of expression, and that all its muscles of arms, trunk, and legs play together in acting out the thoughts that your words make definite.

Conditioning yourself for appearance consists largely in acquiring such a realization, and then learning to limber up your apparatus so that it will respond to your thought-impulses. Do not keep your arms going continuously, but do not forget that talking without any

movement of arms and trunk is as unnatural, whatever you are saying, as talking without any change in your voice.

Continue these exercises for legs and arms, and others that you devise for yourself. Do not think that you have mastered them when you merely *understand* what to do when you think about it. The attitude of easy erectness, the limberness of arms and body that makes possible easy movement in any direction, these are the result of good habits of posture and movement. In particular, if you spend a good deal of time at a desk, stand up now and then during the day, in ordinary conversation, and assume the relaxed erectness of your practice periods. That will reinforce the effect of your drill.

## Chapter 11

### RECOVERING THE GOOD VOICE YOU WERE BORN WITH

Of all the accessory factors in talking to audiences, the way we use our voices is the most potent, yet there is none in which we come so far short of our possibilities. The voice has two different functions. We are careless about both of them.

**Accurate Sound-Signals and Expressive Tones.**—In the first place, the voice apparatus enables us to give definite shape to the sound-signals—words—that carry thought to listeners. In order to make these signals accurately and then to link them smoothly together, the voice muscles must be strong and supple. But most of us enunciate our words very poorly.

In the second place, the voice is a musical instrument, whose tones exert an immediate and powerful influence upon listeners' feelings. There are individuals in every circle whose visits bring delight or dismay merely because of something in their voices. There are radio talkers whose voices have a whine, or a pompous quality, or a suggestion of the Smart Alec that stirs our bile, however reason may assure us that they are harmless, worthy persons. There are others to whom we listen with content regardless of what they say. In each individual, besides, the suggestive power of the voice as it varies from mood to mood is almost beyond limit. Now although everyone reveals this expressiveness of voice when dominated by strong feeling, most of the time, with most of us, expres-

siveness is blurred, because the voice apparatus has become stiffened through careless use. Yet every man and woman has the makings for a voice that is good.

**Patient Training of Muscles.**—Conditioning yourself with respect to your voice consists in rendering the voice muscles supple and firm, so that they shape word-signals with swift accuracy, and thereby respond at once to even faint suggestions from your mood. The great majority of people never think about all this. Many others, who have been made to recognize defects in their voices, suppose they are helpless, incapable of change. But no one is helpless.

**Building a Good Voice Through Proper Conditioning.**—Conditioning your voice will take longer than conditioning your appearance because the technique involved is harder to pick up. Because, for one thing your sense of hearing, which must be your chief guide, will not at first have the sure corrective power which the sense of sight retains with regard to appearance. We do not know how our own voices sound to other people, and in our utterance and tones we hear what we think we hear. One of my New England friends had been chided for his habit of adding an *r* to words like *idea*. When the correct way of sounding such words had been explained and illustrated for him, his mind caught the point at once, but not his sense of hearing. "Yes," he said, "now I recognize the difference. I mustn't say *idear*; I must say *idear*." The sense of hearing must itself be corrected, tuned up, before it is of much use for the purpose, and that is a gradual process.

Yet individuals are all the time working the sloppiness out of their enunciation and the crudeness out of their tones. Transformations no less amazing than the one

Bernard Shaw has portrayed in his play "Pygmalion" are being achieved by men and women continually—largely, I incline to believe, through their own efforts, with what might be termed First Aid from friends or instructors who are not too officious. Certainly the right kind of effort soon begins to show results. Improvement in this matter is quickly recognizable, generally, in Speakers' Clinic members merely as a by-product of applying the controls already discussed.

**Acquiring Clear Enunciation.**—In conditioning your voice thoroughly, a helpful first step is to practice drill exercises in enunciation. These will rid your utterance of indistinctness. They will also make a beginning toward correcting your sense of hearing and giving suppleness to your entire vocal apparatus.

The English language, as spoken in the United States, employs about fifty different sound-signals, produced by action of the lungs, jaw, tongue, lips, and cheeks. About half of these are what are called vowels, which are represented in the written language, according to our clumsy system of spelling, by the letters *a, e, i, o, and u*, and combinations of these. The others are called consonants, represented in writing by the other letters of the alphabet. Vowels or vowel-sounds are *tones*, which result from breathing out air from the lungs across the vocal cords in the larynx or throat. They differ from each other according to the shape assumed by the mouth in producing them. Consonants are really not tones, but stoppages or interruptions of tones. By pressing the tongue against the walls of the mouth at various points, or pressing the lips together, the current of air—and tone—is dammed up for an instant, and when it is released a sound, or noise, results: *b, p, t, d, g, sh, l*, and so on.

Now in our conversation we do not usually make these sound-signals with accuracy. Most of us slur the con-

sonants and confuse the vowels. We sound the *e* of *get* like the *i* of *git*, the *wh* of *when* like the *w* of *win*; we give the colorless sound of *uh* to a variety of other vowels—*Uh want tuh* instead of *I want to*. In talking to groups of listeners such indistinctness makes it hard for people to understand, and what is worse, makes them think you lack full command of your powers. Yet perfect distinctness can be acquired by virtually everyone. It is almost entirely a matter of muscle training. If you move jaw, lips, and tongue in certain ways, giving specific shapes to the mouth, you are bound to produce the sounds you intend, accurately and easily. The Irish tenor, John McCormack, who died only recently, had almost perfect enunciation in his singing, a thing which is very rare, for controlling the muscle actions involved, while easy in speech, is not easy in singing. Gracie Fields, the English actress, has a similar command of enunciation in both speech and singing.

**Consonant Drills.**—Begin by practicing over and over again the following drill sentences for consonants. Complete sentences are given because the individual *sounds* of language never occur alone but always combined in *words*, and these in turn are combined in *sentences*. Your *articulation*, that is, the way you pass from one sound to another, spacing them so that all are clear cut and as emphatic as their logical importance requires, is all-important in rendering your *enunciation*, that is, the utterance of individual sounds, both distinct and natural.

**Exercise 1.**—Memorize and recite the following sentences, each of which features a single consonant sound, repeated again and again.

- p* Polite people ask pardon when pushing past.
- b* Bobby's big brother bought him a rubber ball.
- m* Men make marvelous music with machines.

- wh* Why do you go whistling through the wheat?  
*w* Twenty wagons wound wearily westward.  
*f* Friday she left a fine fresh loaf.  
*v* Vowing a vain vengeance, the villain vanished.  
*th* Thursday is the fifth of the month.  
*th* Breathe deeply, cold though the weather be.  
*t* Waiter, put the butter on that table.  
*d* Do close the door and draw down the shade.  
*n* Neither rain nor snow can hinder the plane.  
*l* Yellow leaves lie loose along the ledge.  
*r* Round the rough rock the ragged rascal ran.  
*s* Sam and his sister sold stamps to sailors.  
*z* Please use the other doors.  
*sh* The shepherds wish their sheep were shorn.  
*zh* Treasure and leisure occasion pleasure.  
*ch* The butcher chose the chops for the child.  
*j* George and Gerald jumped over the hedge.  
*y* Educating youth is our duty.  
*k* Cousin Kate comes from Kentucky.  
*g* The guard dragged the log to the gate.  
*ng* The king was learning that anger is wrong.

In your first days of practice, hold a mirror before your face so that you can see your mouth, and speak the list of sentences over and over, earnestly, expressively. Watch closely how jaw, lips, and tongue move with each of the drill combinations. A few of them call for special care. Perhaps you have never before tried to analyze these signals which we all make constantly.

To form *p*, *b*, and *m* with least effort, press the lips tightly together, directly in the center, and push them slightly forward at the same time. With *wh* and *w*, pucker the lips, push them forward quickly, and spring them apart. The sound of *wh* should more properly be written *hw*, as it begins with a sharp *h*-sound; too often we are careless about this first movement.

Pay especial attention, above all, to the tongue-tip sounds: *th* in its two forms, *t*, *d*, *n*, and *l*. For nearly all of us Americans, these sounds cause most of our indistinctness. The reason is laziness, tongue laziness. With each of these sounds, press the tip of the tongue, pointed like a pencil, tight against the front upper teeth and dam up the breath for a moment. This gives the quick, explosive effect required for producing these signals. Think of your tongue, if you can, as an elephant's trunk, which you curl up to touch, tip-on, to your front upper teeth. And press the tongue tip *tight*. Failure to press the tongue tight in making these sounds takes the backbone out of your utterance; it makes your talk sound as if you had a hot potato in your mouth. The comparison is apt. When, to our astonishment, we get a hot morsel in our mouth, our only recourse, we think, is to keep from touching it with tongue or cheek, and the words we utter at that time are lacking in all tongue consonants. How many of us approach that boneless manner of talking all the time! Listen to some Englishman or Scotchman of your acquaintance and note how cleanly he enunciates these sounds. Britishers have many faults of speech, but in this particular feature we Americans could imitate them to our profit. If you will press the tip of the tongue tight against the teeth, you will make these sounds accurately, easily and quickly.

**Vowel Drills.**—With vowels, the chief difficulty, as already noted, is failure to differentiate them, so that *get* does not sound like *git*, or *going* to like *gunta*. In the English language there are about twenty different vowel sounds—not counting combinations called diphthongs—all represented by the letters *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. The drill sentences that follow give you eight of these vowel sounds which are especially useful for practice. Learning to



sound them accurately will train your ears as well as your mouth muscles. You will begin to notice how other persons produce them, and before long you will be uttering the other twelve vowel sounds with the same care you give to these.

**Exercise 2.**—Each of the following sentences features a single vowel sound. As with the consonant drills, recite the sentences again and again, emphasizing the vowel features in each of them.

- ee* Deep breathing easily leads to sleep.
- i* This is winter, bringing mist and chilly winds.
- e* Reckless Fred sends merry messages West.
- a* Alfred can handle that bad man admirably.
- ah* Father wants bonds, solid profit.
- aw* Off walked the horseman, talking crossly.
- o* Holding the golden bowl, the grocer bolted below.
- oo* Through the cool room moved the foolish crooner.

Now these vowel sounds—and all the others—are differentiated in three ways: by dropping the jaw more or less widely; by drawing the lips back or puckering them; and by holding the tongue high or low in the mouth while uttering the sounds. If you watch your mouth in a mirror while running through that list of drill sentences, you will discover that the first three drill sounds, *ee*, short *i*, and short *e*, (as in *deep*, *mist*, and *sends*) are spoken with the lips drawn back widely, widest for *ee*; that the tongue is held high in the mouth, near the roof; and that the jaws are near together. The next three vowels: short *a*, *ah*, and *aw*, (as represented by *can*, *wants*, *walked*) are made with the jaw dropped so that the mouth is wide open, the tongue low in the mouth, and the lips rounded slightly. The last two vowels, *o* and *oo* (as represented by *bolted* and *cool*) are uttered with jaw and tongue still

lower but with lips puckered. There is a steady progression from *ee* (in which there is only a slit between the tongue and the roof of the mouth), to *oo* (in which the lips are puckered tight as if for whistling). Try this sentence, which combines the eight practice vowel sounds, and you will feel the gradual shift of your mouth muscles as you pass from one sound to another:

*Even if Fred has started, Paul goes too.*

**Practicing These Drills Systematically.**—Bear in mind that merely repeating these consonant and vowel drills a few times will mean nothing for you. If you really want to get rid of sloppy enunciation, run through the list every day, whenever you have an odd moment, as a violinist practices his finger exercises, or as the Johns Hopkins surgeon practiced tying knots for his future operating work—not ten times a day, or twenty times, but fifty or a hundred times at least. Setting up a muscle habit takes repeated effort. But if you give serious attention to this practice for a month or so, you will root the habit successfully, so that you will never lose it. Bear in mind, also, that it is not necessary to utter the sentences loudly; it is the placing of the muscles that matters; you can mutter the sentences over and over while riding on a train or a bus. If you give serious attention to this matter for a few weeks, you will speak more distinctly ever after, all day long.

Distinct enunciation can be much more than a purely negative correctness feature. Perhaps nothing can do more to give an idea of a speaker's energy, his vehemence of nature. Not long ago I was taken to a college theater performance of Shakespeare's fierce tragedy, "King Richard Third," in which a young relative of my friend, an ex-G.I. from an Eighty-second Division dramatic unit

was playing the Crookback. I had heard, with some astonishment, how this young paratrooper, with no acting experience, joining the dramatic unit just for fun after the shooting stopped, had been promptly chosen from among four hundred G.I.'s for the leading part of the tyrant Richard, to play it in a dozen army camps throughout Europe. The young man's utterance, his enunciation, gave ample reason. His voice was good, but untrained. He had a supple muscular body, but so, very likely, had all the other G.I.'s who had not qualified. But the controlled ferocity of his enunciation, the way words and phrases were snapped out, brought the ruthless Crookback alive upon the stage. It was no great surprise to learn a few days later, that the young man had been given a place by Miss Eva Le Gallienne in her new repertory company.

**Building Strong and Expressive Tones.**—These enunciation drills will also have begun the process of making your voice apparatus more sensitive and supple, and thus rendering your tones more powerful and more expressive.

By a good voice for *talking* either to a crowd, a small conference group, or an individual, I mean one that is serviceable, one that has strength, agreeable quality, and expressiveness.

First and always, a voice should have strength; it should suggest vitality, physical energy. Far too many persons who have plenty of vitality fail to show it in their voices; they mumble. Among my friends is a man of large frame whose habitual manner of speaking, even when addressing a group, is little more than a mumble; one must listen closely to catch what he says. One Saturday morning, when only a few of the force were in the office, I dropped in to see him. A telephone call came for a man at the other end of the huge room and my friend

got up and shouted to the other man, nearly a block away, in tones that amazed me, they were so big and resonant. When he sat down and we resumed our chat, his voice retained for a while the same deep, resonant quality, even though no longer loud. That man is habitually allowing his voice to misrepresent him.

An agreeable voice does not necessarily mean a "glee club voice" such as one hears in some radio announcers; that may be actually disagreeable, suggesting affectation. But the tones should be free from sharpness, huskiness, or whine.

By an expressive voice is meant one that will interpret the varying shades of your thought and feeling—spontaneously, unconsciously, as a flexible instrument. Persuasiveness depends very largely upon this quality in one's voice. Everyone's voice possesses it now and then, when one is dominated by strong feeling, but most of the time, with most persons, the voice is dull and monotonous.

**High Voices and Low Voices.**—Voices vary in pitch; they are classed as high, medium, or low according to the size of the larynx. In men, high voices are known as tenor, medium voices as baritone, and low voices as bass. In women, high voices are known as soprano and low ones as alto or contralto. All types are good when properly conditioned. Bass voices, with their deep rumble, have power and impressiveness. The fault to which they are liable is harshness, a suggestion of surliness. In a well-trained bass voice, however, the deep tones have a velvety softness along with their strength that prompts reassurance, trust in the speaker's self-command. Low alto voices among women have a somewhat similar quality. Medium voices, baritones among men and low sopranos among women, are much the most common. Their advantage is their width of range; they can suggest in

some degree the characteristics of the other types. They are the most useful varieties because nearest like those of most listeners. High voices are characterized by tones that are clear cut and brilliant, but if not properly conditioned they tend to be sharp and edgy. Men with tenor voices and women with high soprano voices should take care to employ their medium or lower tones frequently.

The intelligent attention which the radio companies are giving to the voices of their representatives is a public service. Some of the older commentators, it is true, have become very careless, a result perhaps of the earnestness that makes their comments valuable. Several whose service has been long and distinguished are at times almost unintelligible because of their strident tones and jerky utterances—often just a crackling series of consonants with all vowels omitted. Many of the younger announcers, however, on the staffs of the big networks, are really notable, not only for their distinct and natural utterances but for the deep and “comfortable” quality of their tones.

**Avoid Tones That Are Shrill.**—Whatever may be the type of your voice, it is entirely possible for you to make of it, in time, a flexible, expressive instrument. There are two points to keep in mind. One is this: Do not let yourself talk on a pitch that is *high for your voice*. When addressing a large group, everyone is impelled to speak in a tone that is higher, more shrill, than he employs ordinarily. To himself, listening from the inside, the high-pitched tone seems to carry better, and all of us are still under the influence of the old-time public meeting conditions, when no loud-speaker devices existed and reaching a large audience necessitated talking very loudly. Actually, the high-pitched tone does not carry nearly so well as one that is pitched in the middle of your vocal

range. Moreover, and this is a point to allow for, tones that are high for a speaker tend to suggest to listeners that he is either excited or under physical strain—perhaps that he is in a bad temper.

A young man who was a partner in one of the largest American companies in its field, owned almost entirely within a single family, joined the Speakers' Clinic. He did so for the purpose, he told me privately, of learning to talk more effectively in conferences with his partners at which really important matters were settled. He had difficulty in getting his ideas across in these small, intimate discussions. "I don't understand it," he said. "My I.Q.'s all right; my ideas are sound; they take them up eventually. But I have a hard time to get them to listen." Now one evening it chanced that there were only three men at the Clinic and we staged a small sit-down conference on the parking problem in New York, a perennial headache. My friend's firm had been investigating the problem as it affected their multitudes of customers. One of the other men present was the director of a regional trade association. The third man was a commuter by car for whom finding a place for his car during the day was a vexation. The discussion became vigorous, and very soon I discovered one source of my young friend's difficulty in conference talking. His ideas were certainly good; it was evident that he knew much more about the parking problem than the other men present. But when he got warmed up, his voice, which was a pleasant baritone, rose to a pitch where it was shrill and edgy—definitely provocative. He was not "mad" but his tones were unpleasant. When he was shown what was wrong, and took care to pull his voice down into its middle range even when speaking earnestly, the effect was altogether different.

**Exercise 3.**—Such an exercise as the following will aid you in pulling down your voice if you are a person of energetic nature possessed of a high voice that tends to work up into shrillness.

Think of the way you would utter a flat-footed refusal of some impertinent request. For example: "No, I've made up my mind. I've never done that and I won't begin now." Utter this refusal two or three times, not noisily but positively, and *while doing so hold the palm of your hand against the upper part of your chest*. You will feel a vibration, a sort of rumble, as you utter the positive statements in a steady medium-pitched tone. Now take away your hand and watch for the same rumble while repeating the remark in the same low-pitched tone, without touching hand to chest.

If you will form the habit of watching for this sensation in your chest whenever you speak, even in ordinary conversation and especially when engaged in a lively argument, you will have made a start toward finding the proper pitch for *your* voice, the tones around which most of your talking should be centered.

**Never Yell.**—The other point to bear in mind is: Never yell! When earnestly presenting a matter to an audience, you may get to talking much more loudly than usual, so that your tones, which you mean to be positive, become harsh. You may actually be yelling without being aware of it. That is bad. It may be necessary to employ loud tones now and then, but never let go and yell. Instead, put your breath behind your tones, as explained later in connection with Exercise 6, using a pitch near the middle of your voice range. Listeners don't like to be yelled at. Do you?

**Factors in Producing Good Tones.**—The human voice is a musical instrument, somewhat resembling the reed

instruments in an orchestra. The process of producing tones in both speaking and singing is this: You breathe out air from the lungs across two bands of gristle in the throat—the larynx—known as the vocal cords. The pressure of this air makes the cords vibrate and produce faint sounds. The sound vibrations are then given “resonance”—that is, they are reverberated and magnified in the cavities of the mouth and head, as the sound vibrations from violin strings are magnified in the violin box. The entire vocal apparatus is very elaborate; more than forty pairs of muscles are involved, affecting lungs, throat, and mouth, and to produce a satisfactory result they must all be coordinated, act together. If any of them fails to pull with the others, you have a voice tube that is improperly shaped—a “dented trumpet.” The elaborate process is largely automatic, but by observing some simple rules you can do much to direct it. Do certain things and definite results will follow.

**Learning to Breathe.**—Beyond question you should improve the way you apply the power when producing the tones; by this I mean you should improve your method of breathing. You will need to train yourself to breathe in a particular way when speaking, just as a runner or a swimmer learns to breathe in a certain way in order to excel at his sport. Breathing for speech is different, however, from breathing for swimming or running. It is based on the idea of maintaining a steady but elastic column of air behind every sound you utter. Not a matter of taking in breath and holding it, as in swimming, but of controlling the expulsion of breath, feeding it out in a way to produce maximum sound from the vocal cords with minimum effort. If you breathe properly while talking, every word, every syllable, will come out strongly and yet easily. Then you need only modify the amount of pressure and the timing of your words to render



your statements clear and steady, so that listeners can readily comprehend.

**Exercise 4.**—The exercise described below, though seeming to make rather extreme demands upon the practitioner, is nevertheless admirably adapted to its purpose. It should be repeated at least ten times in order that the sensations and actions of the muscles may be identified.

Before going to bed tonight, take off your clothing and lie flat on your back *on the floor*, not on the bed. Lay your hand on the upper part of your abdomen, just below the breastbone. Then breathe in through the nose slowly and deeply, while mentally counting *one-two-three-four*. You will feel the abdomen and lower chest expanding while the lungs fill with air.

Then quickly blow out all the air through the mouth. You will feel the abdomen and chest collapse. The shoulders, resting on the hard floor, will not move. That is the reason for assuming this position when beginning your breathing practice, in order not to move the shoulders but to suck the air deep into the lower part of the lungs by expanding the lower chest.

**Exercise 5.**—Though this exercise partakes of the general nature of the preceding one, nevertheless the end result obtained by practising it is altogether different.

Now, instead of merely blowing out the air, use it to count aloud, *one-two-three-four*, and try to force out all the air in your lungs as you utter the last word, *four*. Your hand will feel the muscles of the trunk contracting sharply, to force the air upward over the vocal cords. Repeat this exercise ten times, counting up to *four*, then to *six*, *seven*, and perhaps *eight*.

**Exercise 6.**—This is a variation of the exercise just preceding. It is, however, somewhat more complicated, and it forms the culmination of the series.

And now stand up on your feet—weight on your toes, as in the drills for appearance—and keeping the hand on the abdomen repeat Exercise 5 several times, counting from *one* to *four*, to *six*, and so on. After the first time, drop the hand and see if you can retain awareness of the play of the abdominal muscles, as they force out the air with each word. Be sure not to move the shoulders, and to move only the trunk muscles as you drive out the air.

Finally, instead of merely counting aloud, speak the words of this sentence: *This-Is-the-Way-to-Breathe*, emphasizing *Bre-e-a-the* and driving out all the air in the lungs as you utter this last word.

When first trying the exercises, do not continue for more than three or four minutes at a time. Though they seem gentle, you may find them more tiring than you expect. Practice them systematically, day after day. Number 6 is the essential one, but Numbers 4 and 5 are needed at first to teach you not to move the shoulders. For a few days, run through the series night and morning if possible. After you have learned to use the trunk muscles without moving your shoulders, you may practice Number 6 as much as you please, at any time.

Vary it, by applying the breath in the same way to other sentences, and then to bits of prose or verse that you recall. At first the tones you utter will be rough, staccato, because the movement of the trunk muscles by which each word is driven out will be sharp and jerky. Soon you will become able to pour out the words of a sentence steadily and smoothly—as if squeezing the end of a tube of toothpaste.

The following poem, "Opportunity," written sixty years or more ago by John J. Ingalls, United States Senator from Kansas, is excellent for your first practice. As here printed, vertical lines have been inserted to di-

vide it into breath-groups. Draw in your breath at the beginning of each group of words, and then speak the group strongly but steadily with all the expressiveness you can give.

Master of human destinies am I! |  
Fame, Love, and Fortune on my footsteps wait. |  
Cities and fields I walk; | I penetrate  
Deserts and seas remote, | and passing by  
Hovel and mart and palace | —soon or late  
I knock, | unbidden, | once, | at every gate!

If sleeping, wake | —if feasting, rise before  
I turn away. | It is the hour of fate, |  
And they who follow me reach every state  
Mortals desire, | and conquer every foe  
Save death; | but those who doubt or hesitate, |  
Condemned to failure, penury, and woe, |  
Seek me in vain, | and uselessly implore. |  
I answer not, | and I return no more.

The mood, you observe, is not gentle; it is masterful, rough, truculent. Utter the lines as if you were the grim, unsympathetic spirit to whom they are ascribed. You are not likely to make the dominating manner habitual, but practicing the lines will enable you to identify the muscular sensations that accompany strong, steady utterance.

Simple breathing exercises like these will lay the foundation for a good voice. Form the habit of *breathing in this way whenever you talk*, in ordinary conversation as well as before audiences. In a short time you will be using the method all the time, automatically. Actually, you use it now for about a third of your time, that is to say, when you are fast asleep; everyone does. And when the habit is once firmly established your tones will be stronger and deeper at all times. Even when speaking

softly, they will have some of the depth and vibrating quality which you admire in good speakers.

**Resonance.**—Thorough conditioning of your voice, however, to render your apparatus fully reliable as an instrument of expression, calls for attention to another factor, namely resonance. To be sure of producing at all times tones of pleasant quality, free from harshness when loud and with good carrying power when soft, you will find it well worth while to go to a good teacher of singing for some private lessons in what is called tone production. Only through the personal coaching of a skilled instructor can the delicate coordination of muscles, more delicate even than in golf, billiards, or fencing, be acquired. In the many centuries of study of singing, exercises have been worked out which pull the voice muscles into harmonious action. A competent singing teacher will serve as the mirrors do in the study of Appearance. He will help to correct your sense of hearing so that it will become a fully trustworthy aid. He will help you to identify the essentials of a tone that has maximum resonance and expressive quality, so that you can know when you are using your voice properly, and why.

A young business man who had been studying singing for several years with a leading New York teacher once entered my class in discussion at the School of Retailing in New York University. The effectiveness of his full, well-rounded tones, even for ordinary business talk, was evident at every session. Most of the members of the class were young fellows with none too much money as yet, but several of them consulted me about finding a good singing teacher themselves as soon as they could afford to take lessons.

**Observation—Listening to Other Voices.**—Your singing teacher will help you little, of course, with the de-

livery of speeches or with conference give and take; all that is out of his line; he is not likely to know business conditions. Therefore, continue the conditioning process for yourself. As with Appearance, proceed by observation and experiment. Every speech that you hear at a meeting or over the radio, every conversation in which you take part, furnishes laboratory aid. As your observation of voices becomes keener, your taste will become more sure and your own resourcefulness greater.

Develop the habit of reading aloud speeches made by other people. That is perhaps the best of all ways to perfect the training of your own voice. The practice it gives you in interpreting ideas and feelings outside the scope of your own routine will expand and enrich your powers. Keep in touch with the speeches of men who are leaders in public life and in the business world. Watching their methods will inform you of current fashions in presentation; there are fashions in speaking as in other activities. It will reassure you, by showing you that they also are employing styles of expression similar to your own, and in some instances, very likely, employing them less skillfully. Some of these current speeches are good, you will find, but some are surprisingly poor. Bear in mind that even in a mediocre speech you may find some useful suggestion. Remember the words of Francis Bacon, one of the most efficient men of whom we have record: "I will light my torch at any man's candle."

Above all, never forget that your own voice can be made a good voice if you will give it a chance. In fact, it is a good voice now, at times. When one is in just the right mental and emotional mood, Nature smooths out the kinks in one's vocal apparatus just as in one's Appearance. You need only remember to create your own good weather, to give the voice muscles intelligent training,

and to stop being careless. You can speak in pleasant and well-rounded tones without being high hat or affected.

Recovering the voice to which you are entitled will take longer than fixing up your Appearance—a year or more of steady concentration instead of a few weeks. But it will be a good investment. It will reinforce every communication you have occasion to make.

## Chapter 12

### FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS READILY

It may appear strange that nothing has been said thus far in these pages about Language, the medium by which thought is given definite expression. The reason is that in the early stages of learning to talk to a group no special attention to language problems will be needed. The words and the sentence forms you employ will differ little from those of conversation. The first need for everyone is command of the great subconscious factors in presenting ideas—Appearance and Voice—to make sure that they do not block the effectiveness of the language used.

Later, however, your attention will turn more and more to the medium of Language, to render your power of conveying ideas more reliable, so that what you say, even in extempore remarks, will have exactness and suggestive force. The speakers to whom we listen gladly at all times are skilled in finding just the right words for an idea and grouping them in just the right way.

**Simplicity, Unobtrusiveness, Naturalness.**—Improvement in command of Language, however, comes slowly. It is not, as with Appearance and Voice, a question of stripping the overlay of wrong habits from a physical mechanism set up by Nature to work harmoniously. Instead, it is a question of gradually creating tastes and standards, through slowly growing acquaintance with numberless little points of usage. To complicate the problem, rules developed for writing have been applied

to talking, mistakenly, by well-intentioned teachers and others. These good people forget that standards of writing and of talking are different because of the different perspectives of the two modes of communication. For one thing, features of language structure that are proper to writing, which permits a reader to turn back and re-read, are out of place in talking. In addition, the standards of talk, even when serious in character, must be primarily colloquial, those of conversation; no one wants to "talk like a book." As a guide to effective use of language when addressing groups, whether small or large, hold fast to the aim of maintaining a free channel between speaker and listeners. That depends in large measure upon your keeping your words, sentences, and sentence grouping simple, unobtrusive, natural.

**Avoid Showy Language.**—There is a queer physical fascination about high-colored language, and anyone is likely to be tempted to try a little fancy skating of the sort for himself, after the first strangeness before a group has lessened. But remember that in responsible talking there is little place for high-colored passages and that when they do occur they must be brief. Talk which is markedly different from conversational standards, which is ornate or elaborate, will be regarded by sensible people as showing off. A remark of one of my Speakers' Clinic friends was significant: "Wallowing in emotional language shows that a man is merely soliloquizing." Far too many persons, I am sorry to say, enjoy wallowing. But it is at the cost of sincerity and effectiveness.

When I was a young college instructor, one of the Freshmen brought me the "declamation" which he had fixed up for a contest. We had regular contests for small prizes, at which the competitors recited passages from well-known orations—good training, as has been already



noted—for study of delivery. This youngster, I found, had selected the tremendous concluding passage of Daniel Webster's most famous oration, the "Reply to Hayne," delivered in the United States Senate in 1830: "I have not allowed myself, sir, to look beyond the Union," and so on. The boy wasn't satisfied, however, with Webster's effort. It wasn't quite long enough for a contest piece, he said. So he had added to it the almost equally impressive conclusion of the second greatest of Webster's constitutional addresses, the "Seventh of March" speech, delivered in the Senate twenty years later. The two passages, laced together with a short sentence of his own, would be just right, he assured me.

It was comical enough, the idea of the little Freshman's piping voice attempting the sounding periods of the great Daniel. But the significance of his naïve scheme of tying together two utterly distinct passages, each of them the conclusion of a long, serious argument, to make a "nice piece," was what it revealed as to his ignorance of the purpose of language. To my young friend the outburst in which a great leader summed up his convictions upon a great national issue was merely a fine-sounding incantation. When he heard my opinion of the unfitness of his plan he gazed at me, "more in sorrow than in anger," as Horatio says to Hamlet, and merely commented: "Professor, you haint got no use for elegance, have you?"

**The Basic Element in Language—Words.**—Using language effectively has two distinct aspects: first, selecting the individual signals, the words and phrases; secondly, combining these in various patterns of arrangement into sentences and sentence groups. Full success with either aspect of the problem involves a slow process of familiarizing yourself with a multitude of details; the marvellous English language is as inconsistent as it is

rich in expressive power. A few control suggestions, tested in the experience of men and women at the Speakers' Clinic and elsewhere, will help you to find your way.

With respect to words, two broad control ideas have been found useful. The first is this: Concentrate attention upon the familiar terms that are used constantly by all people in conversation. The second is this: Consider always the appropriateness of a word to the situation.

**An Adequate Vocabulary.**—Mastery of words for responsible talking is not developed by learning the meaning of a great number of words and working them into your remarks. Many persons assume, quite mistakenly, that they do not know enough words to venture upon addressing an audience. Frequently a new member of the Speakers' Clinic will confide to me that his trouble is lack of words—his vocabulary is too small and he needs to expand it—he did not go to college—or perhaps he went to college but did not specialize in English—and so on. After a few sessions, when the other men have made no comment upon his vocabulary, although panning him freely on other points, he comes to accept my assurance that his habitual vocabulary is as adequate for group address, when properly utilized, as for his conversation.

For with respect to the vocabulary required in talking, two facts should be noted. On the one hand, the number of words that you *know*, that are *known* in the sense of being *understood* by virtually everyone with the equivalent of a high-school education, runs to 25,000 or 30,000 or more. These figures have been confirmed by many tests. You can prove their correctness for yourself if you will take an ordinary desk dictionary and check the words with which you are acquainted, the meaning of which you know in a general way. On the other hand, the words which we habitually *use* when we talk—any of us—in

conversation and in group address alike, number only from 2000 to 3000. Most of these 2000-odd words we picked up unconsciously in childhood, as everyone else did. They constitute our common currency, the words in which we do most of our thinking—all of us—and they are the proper vehicles to use in conveying ideas to other people. If we step far outside of this number, whether with an audience or in conversation, we lessen our effect, for we are employing signals that are not familiar to our hearers. The people who are most highly skilled in responsible talking confine themselves largely to the 2000-odd words of universal currency. By applying these familiar terms accurately and tastefully, they convey their messages with maximum clearness and vigor.

In the presidential election of 1940, the standard bearers of both the great parties were notable for the simplicity of phrasing in their speeches. President Roosevelt's discussions of the issues, particularly appropriate and effective, were couched almost entirely in the 2000-word common vocabulary. Experts in English appreciated the skill with which they were framed, and people who worked with the foreign-born and the uneducated testify to the ease with which these beginners in English understood. For a man of Mr. Roosevelt's antecedents and personal tastes to have achieved such simplicity of wording was an amazing achievement. It evidenced his sound judgment of the limitations and capacities of language. In the case of Mr. Willkie, the simplicity of language was probably more largely instinctive, the unconscious simplicity of a man of the people. His acute mind and resolutely honest character had been enriched by legal study and wide reading, but he still talked like plain people because he felt like them.

**Study the Appropriateness of Words.**—Thus the second control idea regarding words is this: Consider con-

stantly their fitness for the occasion. Do not be content with your childhood notions of what the familiar terms mean, or with merely looking up definitions in a dictionary. Watch how a word is employed by other people, what company it keeps. Among words of the common stock some are used chiefly in business hours, others in time of leisure, some when in a mood of blunt determination, some in a mood of uncertainty. In conversation we choose among these familiar terms by impulse, mainly according to the practice of the people around us. Sometimes, from forgetting their basic meaning, we slip into ludicrous blunders. The charming young lady who exclaimed after meeting one of our great generals, "I got a great kick from him!" showed an enthusiasm which all of us can share, but her word sense, evidently, had not been fully sensitized.

What can you do to condition yourself in this matter of words? There is but one way—to listen, to read, to reflect, and to keep on doing so. Wendell Willkie never lost interest in the problem. Even in the crowded last years of his life he made time to take part as a guest in the "Information Please" radio program, where he held his own with the "Four Horsemen." Improvement never comes by accident and never quickly. Behind it is always a settled habit of considering words, individually and in combination with other words in conversation, group address, and writing.

Not that one must confine oneself to "high-hat" language. The effectiveness of colloquial terms, to give a flash of stimulus or humor on occasion, appeared often in the addresses of Fiorello LaGuardia. His unconventional mind had quick sensitiveness to the power of words. Here is the opening paragraph of the mayor's Sunday noon broadcast on May 7, 1945, when he announced that he would not run for reelection in the fall:

Patience and fortitude!

Well, it just cannot be long now. As you have just heard over the air, it is a matter of days, and perhaps not many days. Yes, the forces of evil in Europe are entirely destroyed and there remain but one or two pockets for reasons which a normal mind, of course, cannot understand. In the one week the world has been cleared of two evil men. And to think that these two bums could have brought so much misery into the entire world—millions of lives, destruction and devastation in almost half the world! Had these two men been killed ten years ago, we might have had a happy world today.

The mayor begins on a note of seriousness. He follows with three sentences of direct, plain language. Then he injects the colloquial "these two bums," getting a laugh from his vast heterogeneous audience and at the same time pointing more sharply his indignation and contempt.

If you will form the habit of considering the meaning and the implications of the words you hear and read, not gobbling them as most of us do in our hurried days, gradually you will develop sureness of taste. Your signals will be more accurate and more direct. You will use prevalingly the common terms of everyday speech, while drawing upon other words now and then to give a passage color or warm it with emotion.

**The Words of Speeches on Great Occasions.**—Examining the words in important speeches by public men, for their appropriateness, is helpful in developing judgment and taste. Here are passages from three addresses on momentous occasions.

**Webster—The "Reply to Hayne."**—The first is that famous conclusion of Daniel Webster's "Reply to Hayne," selected by the young Freshman for his declamation. Webster was probably the foremost public figure of the

United States of 1830. This 355-word passage comes at the end of an elaborate argument on what was becoming the dominant issue before the nation. Read it aloud and you will feel its "thunderous eloquence."

I have not allowed myself, sir, to look beyond the Union, to see what might lie hidden in the dark recess behind. I have not coolly weighed the chances of preserving liberty when the bonds that unite us together shall be broken asunder. I have not accustomed myself to hang over the precipice of disunion, to see whether, with my short sight, I can fathom the depth of the abyss below; nor could I regard him as a safe counsellor in the affairs of this government whose thoughts should be mainly bent on considering, not how the Union should be best preserved, but how tolerable might be the condition of the people when it shall be broken up and destroyed.

While the Union lasts, we have high, exciting, gratifying prospects spread out before us, for us and for our children. Beyond that I seek not to penetrate the veil. God grant that, in my day at least, that curtain may never rise. God grant that on my vision never may be opened what lies behind. When my eyes shall be turned to behold, for the last time, the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union, on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood. Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster, not a stripe erased or polluted nor a single star obscured—bearing for its motto no such miserable interrogatory as, What is all this worth? Nor those other words of delusion and folly, liberty first and Union afterwards—but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing on all its ample folds as

they float over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, that other sentiment, dear to every true American heart—Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable.

No one could fail to note the many unusual words—"color" words—in this passage; I should say there are at least 45, some 12 per cent. Very few of them, it is safe to say, would have been used in ordinary conversation by Webster himself. While the language of public discussion in the United States of 1830, like the dress of the time, was more formal than in our day, the language of conversation was much the same as our own. Webster's language is fervid, magnificent; it would rouse any audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm. There is suggestion of unreality, however. The ideas are expressed throughout in highly figurative terms, appealing to the sense of sight, as if the speaker were viewing a spectacle. Some of the most striking phrases—*gorgeous ensign, full high advanced, arms and trophies streaming*, etc., are not original with Webster but are borrowed from the poet John Milton, from his description of the army of the rebellious angels in "Paradise Lost." One cannot help feeling that Webster, as he drew his splendid picture, was contemplating his own thought rather than thinking of his hearers. His splendid outburst was in fact a war cry for lovers of the Union to take up and repeat in the great constitutional battle before the nation. For such a purpose, the language, although unnatural from the standpoint of ordinary occasions, is admirably suited.

**Churchill—Report on the Yalta Conference.**—Consider next, however, the conclusion of a speech by Winston Churchill, the acknowledged master of large-scale oratory in our day. It is the conclusion of his report on the Yalta Conference, delivered in the British House of Commons

in February, 1945. This also comes at the end of an elaborate address occupying several hours. Curiously, its length is just the same as that of the conclusion to Webster's "Reply," 355 words. This passage also should be read aloud to gain realization of his power.

I suppose that during these last three winter months the human race all the world over have undergone more physical agony and misery than at any other period through which this planet has passed. In the Stone Age numbers were fewer, and primitive creatures little removed from animal origin knew no better. We suffer more. We feel more.

I must admit in this war I never felt so grave a sense of responsibility as I did at Yalta. In 1940 and 1941, when we in this island were all alone and invasion was so near, the actual steps we ought to take and our attitude toward them seemed plain and simple. If a man is coming across the sea to kill you, you do everything in your power to make sure he dies before he finishes the journey. That may be difficult and it may be painful, but at least it is simple.

Now we enter into a world of imponderables, and at every stage self-questioning arises. It is a mistake to look too far ahead. Only one link in the chain of destiny can be handled at will.

I trust that the House will feel that hope has been powerfully strengthened by our meeting in the Crimea. The ties that bind the three Great Powers together and their mutual comprehension have grown.

The United States has entered deeply and constructively into the life and salvation of Europe. We all set our hands to far-reaching engagements, at once practical and solemn.

The United Nations are an unchallengeable power to lead the world to prosperity, freedom, and happiness. The Great Powers must seek to serve and not to rule. Joined



with other states, both large and small, we may found a large world organization which, armed with ample power, will guard the rights of all states, great and small, from aggression or from the gathering of the means of aggression.

I am sure that a fairer choice is open to mankind than they have known in recorded ages. Lights burn brighter and shine more broadly than before. Let us walk forward together.

Here, one notices at once, the individual words are very different from those in the Webster passage; they are simple, familiar. There are not more than a dozen, I should say, two or three per cent at most, which might not be used by any of us in earnest conversation. Churchill's words are drawn from the 2500-odd of everyday use. Yet the passage as a whole is suffused with emotion because of the way the individual words are combined in suggestive phrases: *Stone Age, link in the chain of destiny, ties that bind, set our hands, engagements at once practical and solemn, fairer choice*, and the closing two lines. The language is never theatrical, but it is meditative, literary; those closing lines are virtually poetry. Yet Churchill's words come far closer than Webster's to the atmosphere of common life. Their character aids in putting the lawmakers, whose immediate support he is seeking, in a mood to do what he asks—"walk forward together." His words, like Webster's, are appropriate to the situation.

Truman—First Speech to Congress.—Now consider a third passage, of particular importance to Americans today, by a man not thought of as a great orator. It is from the speech of President Truman to Congress on April 16, 1945, his first public address after his inauguration—an occasion no less momentous than those of the other

speeches. The portion here given, 189 words in length, is the most important passage in the speech, in my judgment. Following the opening tribute to President Roosevelt, this is the statement by the nation's new leader of his own attitude in the nation's crisis.

Tragic fate has thrust upon us grave responsibilities. We must carry on. Our departed leader never looked backward. He looked forward and moved forward. That is what he would want us to do. That is what America will do.

So much blood has already been shed for the ideals which we cherish, and for which Franklin Delano Roosevelt lived and died, that we dare not permit even a momentary pause in the hard fight for victory. Today the entire world is looking to America for enlightened leadership to peace and progress. Such a leadership requires vision, courage, and tolerance. It can be provided only by a united nation deeply devoted to the highest ideals.

With great humility I call upon all Americans to help me keep our nation united in defense of those ideals which have been so eloquently proclaimed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

I want in turn to assure my fellow-Americans and all of those who love peace and liberty throughout the world that I will support and defend those ideals with all my strength and all my heart. That is my duty and I shall not shirk it.

Have not the words of this passage a degree of directness and naturalness even beyond those of the great British Prime Minister? Churchill's words are familiar but they are colored by figurative meaning. President Truman's words are not only simple but used literally. Except for the short opening sentence, they might be written with hardly a change into a contract. The passage shows the adequacy of words that are utterly plain,

provided there is earnest feeling behind them, to convey a profoundly important message, however solemn the occasion.

**Three Types of Wording.**—Speakers in every walk of life are using words in these different ways: in a manner of vehement picturesqueness, or of quietly emotional suggestion, or of earnest literalness—although only examples relating to public affairs are available for general examination. The high-colored Webster type is not one to be cultivated. Unless it is spontaneous it is unpleasant, silly. And spontaneity is possible only to men of the Webster type of personality.

The Churchill type of words can be cultivated if your mind has been stored with the harvests of wide reading and ripened with observation of life. With this type also, however, there is danger of forgetting listeners in care for fancy and phrase-making.

The Truman type, with which words are used earnestly but literally, with no attempt to show off, no "double talk," is within anyone's power. For most of us, beyond question, it is the type to cultivate. And it carries the power that sincerity and determination always give. I know that few speeches I have heard have impressed me more strongly than that of the General Manager of a big department store one morning just after Thanksgiving. I had called at his office early that day, on an errand, and just as I arrived his telephone sounded and he asked to be excused for a few minutes. "I have to go and make a ten-minute talk to our sales people," he said. "I'm no speaker at all, but we are beginning the special holiday work tomorrow and there are some things they'll need to be told. Just a few minutes before the store opens."

I asked to be allowed to go with him, and the experience was one to remember. The army of employees

crowded into a big ground-floor section and the Manager, a solidly built man, gray-haired, with steady eyes and steady, kindly tones, talked to them for six minutes. What he said was absolutely simple. No bluster, no cheap inspiration, just a plain statement of what the firm wanted from them and what they could count on from the firm. His words had the same ring of straightforwardness as those of President Truman's speech. I sensed that day one of the reasons for the high morale, in those years, among the store's employees. It is a pity that more of us do not cultivate that plainness, straightforwardness in our language, instead of pathetically attempting to be showy and impressive.

Incidentally, you will notice the large proportion of one-syllable words in all these examples of effective talk to audiences. In ordinary nontechnical writing today the proportion of one-syllable words rarely exceeds 60 per cent. In the Webster passage it is 69 per cent; in the Churchill passage, 71 per cent; in the Truman passage, 68 per cent. In the short passage from LaGuardia it is 77 per cent.

Here is an exercise for your private practice:

1. From time to time take a newspaper report of a current speech on affairs of the day or on a business theme, and analyze it for command of words. Note the number of long and short words, and especially the proportion of color words, and their appropriateness. See how the speech examined compares, in these points, with those noticed in these pages.
2. Do the same with your own speeches and talks, after delivering them. A day or so after speaking, while what you said is still fresh in mind, sit down and write it out quickly, or dictate it to a stenographer, and then analyze and compare it with these others. After a few attempts you will probably find that you can recall

your talk almost as you delivered it. If you will retain your scoring cards and thus broaden your base of comparison for other speeches, your power of observation and your own manner of presentation are likely to improve steadily.

Getting acquainted with words takes time, like getting acquainted with people, and for the same reason; it is because of their individual character. Mere checking of dictionaries or lists will never reveal the possibilities of even the familiar words you have always known; you must study them, experiment with them. That is the basis of the ability to say what you mean with quick accuracy and with the lightness of touch that keeps people listening.

## Chapter 13

### GROUPING WORDS EFFECTIVELY —SENTENCES

The most important structural element in communicating ideas is the sentence. We do not, as a rule, notice individual words unless they are specially colorful, or unless they are unsuitable; what the mind of listener or reader picks up is the sentences. In writing we build sentences with care, having learned that trouble results from inconsistent or indefinite form. In ordinary conversation, on the other hand, we do not build sentences consciously at all; our words pour out almost by impulse, to fall, almost automatically, into traditional patterns. In our first talks to audiences we follow our conversational practice. Then we discover that in responsible talking, as in writing, this is not safe; the form of sentence that comes to the lips may convey a wrong idea, or may fail to convey any idea at all. That is, if not careful we may pour the thought into statements that are hard for listeners to grasp; they are not like conversation; they are long and rambling or long and intricate.

Therefore, after you are able to talk at any time with tolerable readiness, learn to build sentences consciously while talking. Try to give them, along with the spontaneity of conversation, some of the precision of writing. This may at first seem hard to do, but it will prove easier than you suppose if you will apply two control rules. The first one is: Keep the sentences short. The second is: Keep each sentence an independent remark.

**Keeping Sentences Short.**—Talking in short sentences is a first requisite for effectiveness, almost always. The sentences of conversation do not often run to more than twenty or thirty words. Many are shorter. But when we get steamed up in responsible talk to a group of listeners, earnestly trying to develop a point, the sentences tend to stretch to fifty, seventy, a hundred words, or more. That shows preoccupation.

Sometimes the excessive length comes from hooking together a series of items with “ands,” making a long compound sentence, as grammar books call it, a sort of “string of sausages.” “This happened . . . and then that happened . . . and then that other . . . and I did this . . . and he did that,” and so on. We hear far too many sentences of this type. They are only too easy to utter; they just roll off the tongue; but they are hard for listeners to punctuate and grasp. Beware of them. Divide the string of sausages before serving.

Great danger lies in the sentence that is long and involved, a type that develops when we are trying to explain something that we feel is important. In the desire to state the thought accurately and fully we put in details and qualifications until the sentence becomes a group of many items intricately knotted together. Here is a sentence of ninety-three words, uttered at a meeting of accountants during a discussion of methods of testing inventories:

I think most of us followed the practice, in years past, of testing the prices, extensions, and footings, but not the quantities. In this instance here, as I understand it, the import of this particular change is that where you do not make a physical test of the inventories or—may I put it this way—where, for instance, because a concern is so engaged in the production of war merchandise, or war necessities, that under the rulings from the War Depart-

ment or the Navy Department or the Maritime Commission they are instructed not to stop to take actual physical inventories, that you are expected to express in your report particularly the scope of your examination, the fact that under these conditions a physical inventory was impossible.

The meaning of that sentence is clear, when you read it, but it is a large earful for listeners. To keep in mind all the items and their relationship would be a strain on the attention of any group. Moreover, a speaker is too likely to follow his first long sentence with another and another. Very soon, instead of talking he is "lecturing," which is unfortunate. When a man is making remarks, the atmosphere is informal, natural. When he gets into the ocean roll of long sentences, his talking seems artificial. The demon of preoccupation has gripped the speaker. People may listen, but listening has become an effort.

The manager of a large organization once asked me to advise him about two speeches which he was preparing for a company convention. The first one, a five-minute welcoming talk, was excellent, a series of short, direct, unaffected remarks. The other one, an hour-long explanation of company policies, started in the same style, but as the speaker grew more earnest the sky clouded over; long sentences began to creep in, until the talk sounded like "another Home Office lecture." My friend, however, was a man of keen mind, with sure command of his powers. When his attention was called to the matter, something he had not thought of, that was sufficient. When he met his audience he talked throughout in remarks.

Long sentences usually bring still another difficulty. They lure the speaker into hesitation and "er-er-ing," until he loses his way in his own sentence. He begins with



a grammatical construction of one type, without having clearly seen his statement as a whole. But as he proceeds something comes to mind which he thinks should be inserted. This involves some shift in the form of construction which he cannot at once arrange—and hesitation and “er-er-ing” result. Often the pauses within a sentence, as he tries to clear up the tangles, will be longer than the pause at the end. Long sentences are hard enough on listeners even when trimly built, but they tax an audience unfairly when thus broken into fragments, a jig-saw puzzle of items handed out thoughtlessly by a preoccupied speaker. Obviously preoccupied, because the use of long sentences in a talk to a group nearly always shows that the speaker is thinking of his material; that he is not centering attention upon his hearers and their response.

What can you do about it? The answer has been already suggested: Make yourself think of your talk as a series of remarks. It can be done.

Much can be learned about building statements that are simple yet concise from the scripts of experienced radio announcers and commentators, who must make themselves understood at once by people of every grade of schooling, and with whom every surplus word is a handicap. Here is a passage from a broadcast over the Columbia Broadcasting System on July 28, 1944, by Robert Trout, one of the most skilled of the commentator fraternity. These broadcasts are of course written out beforehand, but they are written in the form of talk sentences.

Yesterday was the blackest day of the war for Germany. Today, on both the east and west, the Allied armies are carrying forward the work of yesterday. Perhaps today's headlines are not so spectacular. After

all, Marshal Stalin cannot issue five different Orders of the Day every day—and, as on the west yesterday, the moment of break-through is the most exciting.

But what follows the break-through is the most important. Today, on both east and west, United Nations armies are constructing Germany's doom, laying the foundations for days far blacker for Germany than was Thursday, July 27th.

The six sentences of this passage of 98 words average only 16 to a sentence, as brief and direct as any informal talk. And observe how much they say.

Can you build sentences thus extempore? At the moment of presenting serious thought in conversation, or before a group? Once at a Dinner Club to which I belonged I sat next to a stranger, a physician who had spent many years as an army doctor. After the First World War, I discovered, he had built up a thriving civilian practice. His talk was deeply interesting. Toward the close of the meal, as we waited for the invited speakers of the occasion, I could not refrain from saying to him: "Doctor, do you realize that you have been explaining medical points to me for nearly an hour and haven't uttered a sentence of more than twenty words or so? That is something new in my experience of medical men, or anyone else. If you'll pardon me, how did you get that way?"

The doctor glanced at me, seeming a little embarrassed, and then said: "I'm afraid you've made me conscious. But the fact is, I have always felt that my patients—they were army people, you know—ought to be able to understand what I told them. Maybe what started me was something the dean said to me the day I got my M.D. at Pennsylvania. He called me into his office and presented me with a volume of speeches by John

Bright, the English Liberal leader, you know, friend of Gladstone. I was surprised, I'd never heard of Bright. I thanked the dean and then asked him why he chose that book, and he answered: 'To teach you some one-syllable words and short sentences.' I've never forgotten his kindly grin as he said it."

In our informal conversation this man had been explaining some pretty technical points, and yet had held all the while to simple statements and short sentences.

**A "Control" for Sentences.**—There is a cure for the fault of long sentences, whether broken or intricate, if you have the nerve to go through with it. Before uttering a sentence, look ahead and select the word with which you will end it. Do not open your mouth to speak until you have flashed the statement you wish to make through your mind. Once you have thus looked ahead you will be able to speak the sentence smoothly, as you utter remarks in casual conversation; one can walk briskly through a dark passageway if there is a little light at the end. You will also drop out the extras, the scaffolding details, that creep into purely impromptu talk. After uttering the sentence, wait until you have looked through the next one, and so on. This plan is a sure cure for sloppy sentence building. It will also result in short sentences.

When you begin the treatment, the silence between sentences may seem appalling; your speech may appear to you a series of independent meditations. Even at this stage, however, your listeners may find your talking more intelligible than most of the material given them by other speakers; they will at least receive units of thought, not fragments. If you will follow the rule rigidly, never beginning to utter a sentence until you have looked through it to the end, your difficulties will soon be relieved. There

will be less and less delay in mentally framing the sentences as you go. In a few weeks, very likely, you will be talking along as rapidly as before, as rapidly as is natural to your way of thinking. Only now your trains will be stopping at the stations, not anywhere along the line. And "er-er-ing" will have disappeared. Here, by the way, you discover new value in Control Number Three of the First Aids; the habit of watching listeners will make it easier to carry through this method of sentence construction.

Some time ago a man came to the Speakers' Clinic whose work required him to talk at short notice on technical subjects, to audiences of semipopular character. His material was very interesting but his sentences were so long and intricate, so interrupted with shifts of direction and "er-er-ing," that it was exceedingly hard to follow him. When he first applied this formula, his experience must have been painful; indeed it was painful even to watch. After uttering a sentence he would have to wait for perhaps ten seconds—and that seems to a speaker a long, long time when on his feet before listeners—until he could go on with the next one. For several months I lost track of him, and then one evening he came into a Clinic meeting with a friend he wished to introduce, and joined extemporaneously in discussing a topic brought up by another member. It was hard to believe he was the same man. His short, trimly outlined statements came in such rapid, easy succession that a stranger would have thought they had been written out and memorized. This plan will work if you will give it a chance.

**The Structure of Talk—Sentences—Stepping-stones.**  
—The second rule in building talk sentences is this: Keep them direct, not only remarks but independent remarks. In conversation our minds do not envision groups of

statements. We think of *one remark*, then of another, and so on. Follow that method when addressing a group. Say something, stop, and look to see if the hearers grasp it. Then add another remark. Do not try to weave the sentences together in the close connection of written style, either by using connective phrases or by inverting the normal sentence order of subject, verb, object. Instead of a smoothly finished roadway, give your listeners' minds a series of "stepping-stones." That is the natural movement of thought in talk. Back in the time of the French Revolution and the wars with Napoleon, probably the most splendid period of the British House of Commons, the foremost master of extemporaneous talking was Charles James Fox. A friend, so the story goes, was praising a speech delivered in the House the night before, when Fox had been absent. Fox inquired: "Did the speech read well, as reported in the newspapers?" "Yes," said his friend, "it read very smoothly." "Then," Fox replied, "it cannot have been a good speech." What he probably meant was that the speech must have lacked the directness of talk. It failed to observe the essential difference between talk and writing, the difference in perspective referred to in the chapter on Words.

In writing, we try to weave statements together by constant use of connective devices. Grammar books list more than fifty words of the type called "conjunctions," all of them frequently used in writing to tie together sentences and clauses. One of the points by which a writer's skill is measured is his versatility in using these conjunctions, together with pronouns and inversion devices, to produce a smooth track on which the reader's mind may roll forward without a jar. But in talking to a group, as in conversation, few connectives are needed, and very little inversion. The thought moves forward by

means of independent remarks, connected logically but not grammatically. Their sequence is emphasized by the speaker's voice and manner. To add the connective material, which is needed in writing because you get no aid from Voice and Appearance, is to render your talk artificial. It shows that the preoccupation demon is at work.

**General Eisenhower's Speeches.**—The difference in directness between the written style and the stepping-stone method was strikingly illustrated by the remarkable speeches of General Eisenhower in the spring of 1945, as compared with the speeches of most of the public men who appeared on the platform with him. At the dinner for the General in New York on June 19th, his speech was preceded by an address of welcome on the part of Judge Irving Lehman of the State Court of Appeals, one of New York's most distinguished citizens. Judge Lehman's speech, thoughtful, sincere, deeply religious, was a highly creditable example of the standard written style of "dinner address." Of the 27 sentences, totaling 1100 words, 17 were of polished, rounded character, smoothly woven together, sentence with sentence and clause with clause, as in this extract:

It has been said that there are more Italians in New York than in Rome, more Irish than in Dublin, more Jews than in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. Doubtless you, sir, have heard some say that because of this diversity of racial and national origin, the great principles of freedom and democracy on which American institutions are soundly based are not perhaps as deeply cherished or as well understood here as let us say in Kansas, that our citizens will not make the same willing sacrifices to maintain what we call the American heritage. The names, General Eisenhower, on the daily casualty lists which we anxiously scan with heavy hearts, the names of the men cited for

heroism and selfless devotion which we read with glowing pride, attest beyond doubt the worth of New York's immigrant sons. Those who say otherwise ignore the real spirit of America and the real spirit of New York.

The sentences of the entire speech averaged forty-one words in length, much longer than in conversation or in the speeches, cited in the chapter on Words, by Webster, Churchill, Truman, and LaGuardia. What made the sentences so long was the mass of connective material.

General Eisenhower's talk, a little longer than Judge Lehman's but uttered more rapidly, was not a smoothly woven tissue. As the following extract reveals, it was a series of dynamic remarks, related in meaning but with few connectives and little adjustment to lace the remarks together. Talk of this character has maximum directness.

We are still at war. I hope that the rejoicing in which we indulge because of the crushing of the Nazis will never blind us to the task we still have in the Pacific. . . . Losses are minimized by producing the most powerful machine that you can possibly crowd into a given area of ground to defeat the enemy. If you apply on the battlefield equal forces, a bloody result is certain. If you apply overwhelming forces, losses for your side are negligible. . . . When that job is done there will be other problems facing you. . . . Prosperous nations are not war-hungry, but a hungry nation will always seek war if it has to in desperation.

We cannot be isolated from the world.

From New York to my headquarters in Frankfurt it is exactly sixteen hours by air. You are that close to trouble all the time if trouble starts in Europe. It is to our interest to see that we are strong. To repeat a remark I made this noon: Weakness cannot cooperate with anything. Only strength can cooperate.

As I see it, peace is an absolute necessity to this world. Civilization itself, in the face of another catastrophe such

as we have faced in the last three years—and for other nations more—would tremble, possibly decay and be destroyed. We must face these problems of peace with the same resolution that America showed in 1941 and '42, when not the greatest optimist could believe that within eleven months after landing in Normandy the American arms and Allied arms would stand triumphant on the Elbe.

I believe that we should let no specious argument of any kind deter us from exploring every direction in which peace can be maintained. I believe we should be strong, but we should be tolerant. We should be ready to defend our rights, but we should be considerate and recognize the rights of the other man.

This business of preserving peace is a practical thing but practicality and idealism are not necessarily mutually antagonistic. We can be idealistic and we can be practical about it.

You have great hospitals in your city that are filled with wounded men. I call them "my wounded men," they came back from my theater. I don't want to see any more of them there, ever.

I feel that if the brains and the intelligence, the genius of America, are placed on this problem, if we can forget self, if we can forget politics, if we can forget personal ambitions, we can solve this problem, and we must solve the problem or we will all be lost.

No man can tell me that America, with its glorious mixture of races, of creeds, its Jews, its Catholics, its Protestants, can fail. We cannot lose.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In connection with this speech we have interesting testimony from Captain Harry Butcher, the general's Naval Aide, in his "My Three Years With Eisenhower." After saying that the general had no ghost writer, but prepared his own speeches, he adds that "he seldom writes a speech, just thinks his thoughts in advance, gets his ideas in order, and then has the ability to deliver them." The New York speeches in June, 1945, he says, were extemporaneous in form, although the ideas had been planned. In fact, they exemplified conference talking.



General Eisenhower's speech totaled 1243 words, comprising 61 sentences, an average of 20 words to the sentence, which is short even for informal chat. The clauses averaged only eight words in length—light and lean, as in eager conversation. Although the emotional stimulus of the occasion must have been tremendous, and although statements had to be made, here and there, which required precise formulation, only eight of the sentences were of the rounded periodic type; all but three were simple remarks that might have been uttered in conversation, *impromptu*. There is lack of clear sequence at one or two points, which is not surprising in view of the excitement which the speaker must have felt. The point to note is that his talk to the great audience was conference talking at its best, direct, courteous, yet cautious—never indiscreet.

One of the good results of modern loud-speaker systems and the radio is the increase of such informal talking in public discussion. Do not be afraid to use this stepping-stone method in your own talks at conferences or meetings. Do not spoil your naturalness by trying to inject the devices that belong to writing. To say that we should all try to parallel the directness of "General Ike" may appear disconcerting, like the old quip to the effect that "anyone could write like Shakespeare, if he had a mind." Yet it is toward such naturalness that we should bend our energies. Say what you mean in short sentences, without connective padding. Continued experience will develop readiness in laying successive remarks smoothly together. Then the mind that you possess will make its best appeal.

**Questions.**—One other suggestion about sentences. When working out a topic in continuous talk you are likely, without realizing what you are doing, to utter your thoughts in an unbroken series of downright statements

—declarative sentences, they are called by the grammarians—each of them in the regulation normal order of subject, verb, object. Unless you are on your guard that may soon result in monotony of cadence, a succession of word-groups of much the same length and accented at about the same points. Such a style becomes irritating to listeners. After a while it puts them to sleep because of the even swing of the groups of sound. How can you prevent this? Break up the sequence. Insert plenty of pauses. Especially, every so often cast one of your statements in the form of a question. Haven't you noticed how a question acts at once to break up monotony? As noted in an earlier chapter, questions stimulate a listener's interest. They also help to keep him awake.

**The Line of March.**—With respect to effective ways of arranging sentences in larger units, for an audience or a conference group, little need here be said. The logical formulas that apply in conversation and writing apply also before a group of listeners. Keep the plan of your discussion simple, however. Group what you have to say, if anywise possible, into not more than three or four points or steps, as suggested in the discussion of Control Number Two. The need for doing this arises, like the need for using short sentences, from the listeners' difficulty in remembering and piecing together what they hear. Unless you allow always for this difficulty, your audience is likely to slip away from you; while still present in body they will have lost touch with what you are saying.

**"Road Signs."**—When developing a subject at length—as sometimes you may have to do—this limitation of the number of steps may be impossible, and then comes danger that the audience will get lost in the series of points and subpoints. Old hands take care to supply

plenty of the "red arrows" suggested in connection with Control Number Two. The beginner thinks such road signs unnecessary; he fears they will offend listeners. The old hand has learned better. Wishing his audience not only to pay attention but to grasp and retain what he is giving them, he makes sure, point by point, that they are doing this. He states and restates what he is going to cover, what he has covered, what he will take up next, and at the end he sums up definitely the meaning of the speech as a whole. This method of the experienced speaker has never been better expressed than in the words of the old-time daky preacher who was asked for his rule for building a sermon: "Fust I tells 'em what I'se gwine tell 'em. Den I tells 'em. Den I tells 'em what I'se done tole 'em." In this compact statement is the wisdom of centuries. If you will apply it in building your own speeches, you may be fairly sure that the listeners who started with you will still be listening when you reach the end of your talk.

Your private conditioning practice is likely to have increasing interest for you, as growing command of technique begins to affect your score before listeners. If you will remember that Language, like Appearance and Voice, is only a vehicle for ideas, not something to be "wallowed in" or used for personal display, people will listen with pleasure and respect whenever you address them. You will, of course, modify and supplement the suggestions offered in these pages. In this most intimate activity suggestions from other persons can give only rudimentary aid. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt learned much in their time, no doubt, from coaching, but they went far beyond the point where any coach could be of use.

## Chapter 14

### DO NOT TALK TOO MUCH

These chapters have dwelt upon ways of limbering up the talk apparatus, acquiring ease and readiness. But after getting rid of dumbness one may fall victim to another ailment even more troublesome, the impulse to talk too much.

Delighted males have chortled for centuries over a mediaeval playlet: "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife." How a gentleman of old-time Southern France had a wife, beautiful, loving, and good, with but one defect: she was dumb; she could not speak; until a wise physician cured her, to the joy of husband and friends. How then, the lady, when once she had found her voice, never stopped using it until the husband in despair once more sought out the physician, this time to shut her up, only to be told: "My friend, that is beyond my power! For the ailment of too much talking there is no cure." Now it must be stated without reservation that the sterner sex has no immunity from the ailment of too much talking. Everyone, perhaps, has known men who had never been talkers, who found they could use their voices and thereafter used them too much, sounding off when there was no reason. Always a man needs to keep in the foreground of his mind Control Number One, and make sure he has a good reason for talking.

**Keep Your Amateur Standing.**—This caution has two aspects. In the first place, don't be too ready to talk. Don't give the impression of being overfond of the music

of your own voice, for if people get that idea your power of convincing disappears. One of my friends remarked to a younger man who was being often called upon at dinners and meetings: "Talk whenever you have something to say, Jim, but don't let people think of you as just a talker. Don't lose your amateur standing." His point was illustrated strikingly at a Bankers Club luncheon, where the two speeches of the day were made by vice presidents of the same big downtown bank. One of them, a man who was later president of the American Bankers Association, had come to be thought of particularly as the "speaker" of his organization, constantly in the limelight on public occasions. When he rose to speak that day, everyone settled back to enjoy his perfect technique. But when his fellow vice president arose, just back from a visit to London, and known only as an "operating man," everyone sat up to hear what he had to say. This man's technique was as skillful and finished as the other's, yet it did not divert the listeners' attention from his ideas because he was not thought of as a "speaker"; he had not lost his amateur standing.

Someone has said: "The orator is the only artist who prefers not to be *known* as an artist at all!" I do not know who first said that, but there is a reason behind it. At a murder trial in the quiet little city where I once lived, I saw a highly skilled verbal artist lose a case because of listeners' distrust of the speaker who seems to be a professional. A mouselike elderly bachelor, clerk in a law office, suddenly assailed and killed a roystering fellow clerk. There appeared to be a strong chance for him to escape the rope through a plea of insanity, and when the defense brought from the nearest big city a famous criminal lawyer, ex-governor of his state, the chance seemed a certainty. But the prosecution turned the tide by play-

ing up relentlessly the "Governor's" hypnotic charm as a speaker, warning the jury to be on their guard against his wizardry. Everyone will recall the words that Shakespeare put into the mouth of his consummate spellbinder, Mark Antony, assuring the crowd in "Julius Caesar," "I am no orator, as Brutus is; But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man."

**Don't Talk Too Long.**—The other aspect of the general caution is just as important. Even when you have a message that needs to be delivered, do not talk too long. That is something for every one of us to bear in mind, in a conference or a committee meeting. I recall the indignant protest of a public accountant whom I fell in with one evening at dinner: "We've been going round and round the same point in a client's office for six hours today, and we go at it again tomorrow. It isn't a complicated matter but they can't keep on the beam. Why do people lose all sense of *time* when they enter a conference?"

Now the difficulty, strangely enough, grows out of the very feature of such meetings that ought to expedite business—their informality. To make sure of getting maximum light on the subject in hand, the discussion is kept informal, conversational. Unfortunately, however, this leads us to forget that we are not conversing but engaged in a consultation in which everyone is expected to express his views but no one is to hold up progress. Insensibly the conversational form slips us into the conversational attitude of mind, when getting on with the main point may yield at any moment to curiosity about a trifle. Someone chances to voice a query about a minor detail; someone else picks it up to correct him; and before long the whole group is off the course. Then it becomes only too easy for responsible men to quibble about

trifles, perhaps to fight old battles over again—and to spend hours on a matter that they could dispose of in fifteen minutes.

**A Simple Rule.**—There is one simple rule that will help. When a remark occurs to you in a committee meeting, take a moment to plan it, like a little speech, before opening your mouth. Even if it is only a question, do not permit yourself to do the exploratory work upon it out loud. Because we forget this caution, our conference talk is almost always more detailed, more wordy, than we intend. What is worse, we say things which we do not quite mean to say, which make other people interrupt, and thus still further hold up the proceedings. Looking ahead before speaking cuts out asides and irrelevancies, the scaffolding material that accompanies the first awkward formulation of one's thought. By looking ahead you save time, not only on your own part but on that of the other people, for it is usually this scaffolding material, not essential to your point, which stirs controversy.

There is one group of our citizens who have developed to a high degree the habit of treating even their briefest remarks as speeches, to be planned and controlled. These are the secretaries of trade associations. They are constantly taking part in conferences. They must be ready at a moment's notice to give an opinion or smooth out a tangled situation. Accordingly, they acquire a control of even their shortest impromptu remarks that is almost automatic, making sure that what they say is pertinent, never permitting themselves to just "think aloud." At the meetings of their own professional body, the executives association, it may be noted, business goes through with amazing speed and smoothness because it is free from the inadvertent crossing of wires which causes most group delays.

Here is a suggestion that each of us might well adopt in conference talking: Try to limit your remarks to speeches of not over half a dozen sentences—perhaps two or three hundred words. Say that much and stop, to let someone else speak, as polite people do in conversation. Remarks of that length are short, more's the pity, as conference talking goes. Yet a contribution of 250 words, taking only two minutes to utter, is the equivalent of four night-letter telegrams. You may be surprised at how much can be said, concisely yet not curtly, in a little speech like this. You will be omitting the scaffolding, the repetitions and digressions that make so large a part of most conference talk. The backbone, the essential part of your thought, will stand out. As the discussion proceeds you will get an opportunity for another little speech. In this way you can press your point without wearying the other people. Working with trim little speeches like these in the committee sessions in which you take part may be decidedly worth while. It will help to control your own impulse to ramble, and it will tend to lead the others in the group to reply in kind.

**Be Yourself.**—Foolish people say: Niceties of voice, manner, detail wording, and arrangement in everyday contacts are of trivial importance; just use your common sense. Unfortunately, that easy-going counsel leaves out of account the demon of preoccupation. You need always to watch your step, to allow for the difficulties which other people experience in grasping what seems to you a matter of course. On the other hand, conscious worry over such detail kills your spontaneity. Here the conditioning described in the last few chapters comes into play; it provides automatic control, so that your individuality shows clearly, whatever the situation. What counts ultimately, remember, in your effort to reach another mind



is the impression he receives from your individuality as a whole, from the way you speak as well as from your statements—that you are on the level, that you are competent to give an opinion on the subject, that you mean what you are saying, and that you are talking to *him*.

## INDEX

- Ad Libbing, its usefulness, 43
- Affectation, to be avoided, 6, 14
- Appearance, 16, 74-83
  
- Beginner's Embarrassment, 26-28, 46, 61, 75
- Breathe, learning to, 97-101
  
- Consonant Drills, 87-89
- Controls, 43-68
- Courtesies, primary, 19
  
- Delivery, 16
  - mental attitude and, 44
  - overcoming careless, 29-41
  
- Earnestness, misdirected, 33-37, 68
- Enunciation, learning to speak plainly, 86-93
- Examples, use of, 65
- Exercises,
  - breathing, 98, 99
  - consonant drills, 87-89
  - setting-up, 76-83
  - tone of voice, 96
  - vowel drills, 89-91
  - word, 117, 118
  
- Gestures, 80
  
- Habits,
  - bad, 27-41
  - good, 69-138
  
- Insincerity, fatal, 46, 47
  
- Language, command of, 104-118
- Listeners,
  - become sensitized to audience, 66, 67
  - make listening easy, 18-35
  - talk to individuals in the group, 63, 64
  - tapping the minds and feelings of, 67
  
- Mental Attitude,
  - delivery and, 44
  - developing the right, 14, 15
- Message, framing the, 55-58
- Mumbling, 30, 31
  
- Notes, use of, 39, 40
  
- Over-Carefulness, 39-41
- Over-Fluency, 31, 32
- Over-Reticence, 35, 36
  
- Perfunctoriness, 46, 47
- Posture, 29, 74-76
- Practice, systematic, 71-73
- Preoccupation, the primary danger, 16, 17, 26-41
- Preparation, 43, 44, 48-61
  
- Questions, usefulness of, 65, 66, 130, 131
  
- Sentences,
  - closing, 58, 59
  - "controls" for, 124, 125
  - effective, 119-132
  - opening, 59, 61
- Short-Notice Talking, 59, 61

- Soliloquizing, to be avoided, 16, Time,  
24, 63 over-running, 34-36, 67, 68,  
135, 136  
Speakers' Clinic, planning, 57, 58, 67, 68, 136,  
137  
origin of, 3, 4  
requisites, 6-9  
results of, 10, 11  
Spontaneity, 14, 68  
Stories, use of, 65  
Tones, voice, 92-103  
Talking,  
responsible, 12-15, 23-25  
short-notice, 59-61  
spontaneous, 14  
Vocabulary, adequate, 107,  
108  
Voice, conditioning, 84-103  
Vowel Drills, 89-91  
Words, selection of, 105-118



